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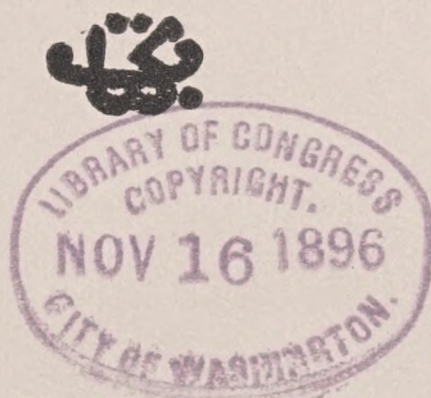
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THE
AMERICAN DUCHESS

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BY ✓
THE PRINCESS DE BOURG



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Dedication

TO MY BELOVED DAUGHTER

L A U R A

WHO HAS BEEN MY PRIDE AND COMFORT ALWAYS, AND WHO
HAS OPENED FOR ME THE BEAUTIFUL GATES OF

“THE IDEAL WORLD, WHERE THERE
IS NO DESPAIR.”

“And oh, most like a regal child wert thou!

.
Fair shoulders, curling lips and dauntless brow,

.
And proud the lifting of thy stately head,
And firm the bearing of thy conscious tread.

CAROLINE NORTON

VENICE, 4th September 1894.

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THE AMERICAN DUCHESS

CHAPTER I

AMBITION

“Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll !
Leave thy low vaulted past !
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea !”
OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

“HAVE I seen the duke? No, and I don't want to. There !”

“You needn't be so rude, Kitty. I was over to your Aunt Nan's yesterday, and she said you were going to be sent to your gra'ma's in New York, and there you will see the duke, sure.”

“I don't want to see him, and I won't go to New York, and leave poor father all alone, with only stupid old Nan.”

Kitty threw up her chin in the air with a defiant gesture, the better displaying its central cleft, and the delicate curves of her throat. She stared defiantly at her tormentor, with wide-opened blue-grey eyes, whose long black lashes, thus turned upwards, seemed to kiss the sweeping arch of her brows. The delicate colour under her transparent skin deepened quickly to an angry red. With an impatient jerk of first one little sunburnt hand, and then the other, she threw the masses of her heavily waving hair backwards. As she moved it, the sun glanced over its length, and her companion eyed it enviously, as she sat facing Kitty. She, too, was handsome, but she had not the winning grace of the other; she knew this, and hated Kitty accordingly.

“You’d make a good duchess yourself, Bessie; you’d better go hunt the duke if you take such an interest in him—that’s if you get the chance, but I daresay you won’t. I’m sure I don’t suppose he’d care to come around here when he has all the Charleston people wild about him. I heard of nothing else when I went there on Wednesday to see Uncle Jack.”

“I wish I had had your luck to be there now;”

and Bessie looked with contempt at her little cousin. "But you're so mighty simple that you came straight back instead of staying on and getting a good time."

"I shouldn't want a good time away from dad, and I won't go to New York," said Kitty, with emphatic gesture, as she shook out her pink cotton frock. She had arisen, and the setting sun behind her illumined her slender form, making her appear much taller than she really was to the other girl still sitting amidst the new-mown hay.

Bessie looked out moodily towards the mountains, of which Pisgah was king. She was wondering what like was this English duke, and remembered tales wherein great marriages had been made, and great riches and high positions gained. The rose-colour of her mental vision blinded her actual vision to the magnificence of setting sun, which went down over the shoulder of old Pisgah, and filled the skies with gold and crimson, bringing into sight line after line of lesser intermediate hills, never distinguishable from one another in the broader light of day, and only revealed to man's wondering vision by the magic light of this most magic hour. Bessie saw nothing.

A sullen look was upon her handsome, regular face, and her pretty, full lips were slightly pursed in discontent. She sat with hands clasped about her knees, blind to all around her, and pondered. Why was she not Kitty? What would she not have given to be herself and yet in Kitty's place. It was ridiculous for Kitty to pretend she would not leave her father with Aunt Nan. She herself would not have hesitated for a moment had Fate but given her such a chance. New York in the winter, Newport and Europe in the summer—what a life of delights! To be admired by everybody, and to know everyone worth knowing, and, above all, to be rich, very rich, and rich in her own right. The thought was overpowering. Bessie closed her eyes as if to shut out all lesser visions. Her simple Southern life had always been distasteful to her. She longed for the wings of wealth that she might fly away into the wide world, which to her meant New York, and there live a life of idleness and enjoyment. She hated toil, and life in the South means work for all, with very few exceptions, especially for women, left as they are without reliable help, and subject to every caprice of the decadent

coloured race. Bessie's head had dropped upon her hands, and she was wrapt in reverie, when from the house came the sound of the rattling of tea things being roughly jerked upon a table, and forks and knives clattered in heaps upon the board. Then a weak voice raised itself and called her name twice, and Bessie's mother appeared at the kitchen door, her hands and apron all flowery from the making of the cakes which would in a few minutes come hot upon the table.

Bessie's dreams were scattered.

At this moment sounds of horses' hoofs and merry child voices were heard approaching under the great trees which filled the "yard." Then through the dusk could be discerned an old white horse dragging a buggy load of laughing youngsters, who screamed the louder when they saw the lighted windows and signs of bustle within, telling them of home and tea time. As the buggy slowly made its way past the kitchen, the delicious odour of the frying chicken and the scent of the hot cakes brought a howl of delight from the children, whose already outrageous appetites were further whetted by the pleasant smells. The old horse drew himself up before the verandah and set

his front feet resolutely, as much as to say that he had done his duty, and did not mean to budge another inch. The buggy wheels ceased their complaining, and an ancient "nigger," with grizzled pate, rushed out of the kitchen, his mouth full of hot cake, and his eyes rolling with the effort he was making to swallow the same before "Mister Joe" should demand speech of him.

"Come, Unc' Jake, hurry up! What are you bungling about now?"

Jake had got alongside the old horse, and was pretending to look at the harness whilst he made a superhuman effort to get the scalding cake down his throat. As Joe called out he raised his head, shut his gaping mouth firmly, and stretched his neck forward with an undulatory motion such as a chicken makes when swallowing, then opening his eyes wide, with a final gasp of relief, replied solemnly,—

"Massa Joe, I'se tendin' to dat strap what bruk' yest'd'y, and I'se mighty glad it ain't bruk' ag'in ter-day, mighty glad, mos' mighty."

"Here, get out of that, Jake, you old fool, and help me in with little Jim; he's asleep."

A broad smile illumined the old nigger's furrowed kindly face, as he tenderly took the

sleeping child from Joe, and turned in to the house. Thus also had he carried Joe himself in the old slave times "before the war," that pathetic date which all Southerners make use of, and which one hears continually, reminding one with sadness of missing sons, changed fortunes and ruined homes. As the old man walked with the child in his arms, Bessie passed him without a word to Joe or a look at old Jake's burden. At the kitchen door she entered, and, shaking herself free of the clamorous, clinging children who instantly surrounded her, passed through the long, low apartment with its pleasant smell of burning wood, made foul by the odours of two dim paraffin lamps, and went into the large tea-room beyond. There she found the grown-up part of the family already at table — her mother with the big coffee-pot before her, and around her many brothers and sisters, who with their families had come up to this mountain retreat from the distressing heats of "the Mississippi bottom". At one end of the table sat Uncle John, a smile upon his kindly face as he dispensed fried chicken from a heaped-up dish before him; and at his side sat Kitty, her lovely cheeks

still slightly scorched by the cooking fire over which she had been working whilst helping pretty little Mrs Kitty, her aunt, and Bessie's mother, since she had left Bessie to her dreams of dukes, marriages and the great world. Bessie threw herself discontentedly upon the hard wooden seat next Uncle John, and looked with disgust at Kitty, just now laughing up into her uncle's face and cuddling one of the little ones who sat by her other side. The table was already full, and thus the buggy load of little hungry stomachs had to bide their time till the elders had eaten, and be contented later on with such scraps of the drumsticks as remained of the fried chicken, grown cold and sodden in the midst of a sea of flakey fat, and odd bits of cold hot cake, and bread without much butter. Of course, no one could be expected to worry over what children ate, and the butter, somehow, generally melted and ran out even before the elders had finished—the hot cakes needed so much. Two tall paraffin lamps stood upon the long table, illumining either end of it, and casting a bright light upon the faces of the elders seated round, each with its own index of cares and worries writ upon it. Breaking

through these lines of wearied ones it passed beyond and shone upon the groups of small heads peering in at every window, all with the same expression of hungry expectancy dancing in their eager eyes.

Pushing through the group of white children at the door, came a sturdy, coloured child, not darker than some Spaniards are, and with a brilliant carmine in her cheeks. Her face lacked the careless, happy child look—she had already begun to taste of the weariness of the battle of life. Solemnly coming up to Mrs Kitty, she said,—

“Miss Liza wants some hot cake.” Then she stood stolidly waiting, with the corner of her old cotton pinafore twisting in both hands. She never stirred, but her restless eyes searched the whole length of the table, and she took in everything which was going on at a glance.

“Gran’ma mustn’t have hot cake, mother,” called out Bessie from the other end of the table. “The doctor said so last time he was over to the house.” Here she rose, glad to get away, and said, “I’ll go to her myself. Here, you, go and wash dishes,” she added, giving the black child a cuff as she passed her on her way to the door. Rubbing her

cheek slowly, the little one turned towards the kitchen, passed through it, and ran quickly out into the night. Bessie's exit caused a general movement of the elders outwards to the verandah and adjacent parlour; and a rush of the little ones inwards. They came scrambling into the hardly—vacated seats, noisily seizing plates and dishes indiscriminately, and raised a general clamour for the black child; who, though only of their own age, now appeared, and undertook the general superintendence of the noisy horde.

CHAPTER II

KITTY

‘A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command.’

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

NEXT morning, Kitty, without waiting for the general breakfast, rode off home on her tall black mule. She had waylaid Mary, the white dairywoman, on her way from milking. As they passed old Jake’s cabin, they saw Aunt Dinah making wheat cakes. Spying her darling, old Dinah called out,—

“Glory! Miss Kitty, am dat yo’? Come in and hab some of yer old Dinah’s wheat cakes. Brung in dat milk, Mary, and let’s make de chile eat her fill ’fore she sets out over ter Massa George’s. Woan’t yer tak’ one ob de boys along o’ yer, Miss Kitty, it be mighty lonely fo’ yer all ’lone a top o’ that ridiculus mountain ob a critter, and I’m mane feared to let ye go. Come in, honey.”

“Don’t you worry about me, Aunt Dinah,” laughed Kitty, brightly. “I want to get a cup from you to drink some of the milk, and—yes, I’m hungry,” she said, taking a plate of Dinah’s delicious new-baked cakes, hot, and with some of the sweet wood-ash still clinging to them in parts.

“My! Miss Kitty yo’s lookin’ mighty lubly this mornin’! War yo’ get that pictur’ ob a sun-bonnet, all covered wid dem lace ruffles. Golly! I doan’t want to hab de gettin’ ob it up in de wash. My! Mary, but de chile is gettin’ han’somer ebery day. I tells Jake sometimes her ha’r ’ud mak’ de angels ’em-selves envious wid its bein’ all colours at once; gold at de turn ob ebery wave in it, an’ chestnut; and fac’ it looks as if de sun had kissed it and lef’ it all afire wid glory; an’ it so thick and long, too. An’ her eyes is like two stars in her face, and de colour nebber still in dem pretty cheeks, comin’ and goin’, comin’ and goin’, but nebber gone. Oh, chile, chile, yo’s a sight too good an’ lubly fo’ dis wicked earf.” Here the old negro woman came behind Kitty, as she sat laughing and eating the cakes, and with a passionate gesture laid her old black hands on the pretty hair,

and, turning backwards her pet's head, kissed the white, upturned forehead fervently.

"Dinah! Dinah! you'll make me spill the milk!"

The sun-bonnet had fallen to the ground, leaving Kitty's head bare in the sunlight.

Plain-faced Mary had sat herself upon an upturned tub, and wagged her head in approval of every point of old Dinah's eulogy. She and Dinah had nursed the girl from infancy, and they each felt a sort of proprietorship in her. Her wonderful loveliness filled them with pride, as they saw it developing each day more fully.

"She'd make a lovely duchess—" began Mary, but checked herself with a start, as she saw the indignant light in Kitty's eyes.

"Mary, how dare you! I wouldn't marry that horrid duke if there wasn't another man in the world!"

"Marcy! Miss Kitty, doan' yo' git so obstretcherous. It 'ud be only fit that yo' shu'd git him then insted ob one ob dem rampagin' Charles'on gurls as dey say is sho' ter git him, golden coronet an' all. Dey's mighty bold hussies down dar, I'm thinkin'."

Here old Uncle Jake appeared, leading one of the tallest and wickedest-looking black mules ever foaled. The beast knew and respected Uncle Jake, so he walked along pretty respectably, merely rolling his eyeballs and nervously twitching his tail, which, by the way, looked as if it had been grievously gnawed by rats. As he followed Unc' Jake, each time he lifted his hind feet he held them suspended and quivering for a moment, as if longing to lash in to some of his multitudinous enemies. That mule had lots of character, and a mule with character always has enemies. A kind of devious smile lifted that mule's lips every time he lifted those hind feet; this smile had a saddening effect upon those who encountered the brute unawares, and that beast was called, being nothing if he wasn't a good old Southern democrat, "President Cleveland," by preference, "Cleve," for short in the family circle; but when Kitty introduced him in society she always gave him his full appellation.

"Lor'! Miss Kitty, 'Cleve's' bin an' bit de ears nerely off of ole 'Hubert.' I'm 'fraid dat done woan't be wuff ennyphing fo' a month ter come; an' little Miss May wantin' ter larn ridin'."

“Cleve” rolled his eyes worse than ever, as he remembered.

“I told you not to put ‘Cleve’ along with ‘Hubert,’ Jake. Why don’t you mind what I tell you? Here, give me your hand.”

With a light spring Kitty vaulted into the saddle, and as “Cleve” was in a hurry to be gone, she had only time to turn and wave her whip hand to them as they watched her disappear, laughingly, around the shoulder of the hill.

“None of the rest of them can touch her for goodness,” said Mary, raising her milk-pail. “You should see the lovely silk shawl she brought her old gran’ma from Charleston, and me a warm muffler to keep the cold out o’ my ears when I’m milking in the winter.”

“Bless yo’, an’ she didn’t forget her old Dinah, neether. Look at dem yaller ribbins! I’s goin’ ter wear ’em ter camp-meetin’ Sunday; and Jake, she brung him a fine tie, all red, and blue spots on it. But Miss Bessie ’d never ha’ thought to ’a done it. She’s all so took up wid herself, and she ain’t near as pritty as Miss Kitty, neether.”

Old Dinah stuck her comfortable arms akimbo and looked inquiry at Mary, who had set the weighty pail down again. Mary’s cheery red

face beamed, as she pushed back her big pink cotton sun-bonnet, which had fallen forward over her nose.

“Miss Bessie’s always worryin’ about getting married, and bein’ rich. I declare since we heard all them stories about that English lord, or juke, or something, that’s turning all the ladies’ heads in Charleston, she’s sat and sulked herself quite pale. They do say—at least, I heard Miss Liza telling Mr Joe—that Kitty’s to be sent to her other gran’ma in New York to be brought into society,”

“Bother society an’ old Madame—what yer call ’er!” burst out Dinah, indignantly. “She nebber took no notice ob de chile all dese yars, and nebber even come ter see her own pore chile and close her eyes when she was dyin’; and that blessed little babe upon her breast. She has nebber fergivin’ her marryin’ Massa George, nebber.”

“I don’t believe they’ll git Kitty to ever leave her father,” said Mary, thoughtfully, “and they’ll—”

“Can you tell me the way to Bald’s Shoulder?” interrupted a man’s pleasant-sounding voice.

“Golly!” exclaimed old Dinah, starting

round and facing a stranger. "War' yo' say, sah?" she inquired, with a broad smile beaming all over her shiny black visage, and showing her fine white teeth.

"The way to Bald's Shoulder?" The stranger spoke with an unfamiliar accent, and the two women regarded him closely as Dinah answered,—

"Thar's two ways. Thar's de car'age road, an' that takes yer most o' four hours ter git aroun' dere; and den yo' can git 'cross by de short cut, pass' Massa George's corner, an' dat makes two hours shorter."

"Thank you," replied the stranger courteously. "Can you point out the way by the short cut?" Here he slipped a big silver dollar into the old woman's palm.

"Why, 'corse I can, sah, nat'rally. Where's dat blame ole niggas gone to, I wonder?" she burst out, beginning to hunt old Uncle Jake. "Oh, Jake! oh, Jake! Yo's allus out ob de way when yo's wanted, an' in it when yo' isn't. Jake, I say!"

Meanwhile, the stranger stood watching Mary as, with her heavy pail, she quietly went along the path which led towards the house.

"Oh, Jake," shouted the old wife again,

“hurry up, yo’, doan’t yo’ see the stranger wants ter find the bridle-path ter Bald’s Shoulder? Git, an’ put him in de way ob doin’ so?”

Uncle Jake shambled up at this moment, bowing profoundly to the handsome stranger who stood quietly awaiting developments by the door.

“Yo’ come ’long o’ me, sah, an’ I’ll soon d’rect yo’, sah.” Jake gave a nervous hitch to one side of his old pants, as he glanced up sideways at Aunt Dinah, who stood snorting with anger at his tardiness.

“Git ’long thin, will yo’, yo’ worfless ole niggar. Hurry up!” was Dinah’s parting benediction.

.

An hour later Kitty turned into the bridle-path from the road. She had not gone by it direct, as she had halted to see old Dinah’s daughter, Olympia, who was sick in her cabin down by Tom Harst’s place. Thus it was nearly two hours after starting out for home that she turned “Cleve’s” head into the shady bridle-path. The sun had mounted high, and the air began to fill with the drowsy hum of busy insect life. The trees overhead, meet-

ing, gave a cool shade, with here and there a break through which the sunbeams pierced, making a fantastic patterning of dancing leaf reflections beneath the black mule's feet as he walked leisurely onwards. The morning was so fresh that Kitty did not hasten. She was enjoying this ride through the woods where the sun had even yet not dried the dew from off its leafy bed. Kitty was thinking, and her thoughts were not altogether untroubled. She was disturbed at what they had told her about sending her to New York. She thought with contempt of Bessie and her arguments, and became more than ever fixed in her determination never to leave her father. As she rode she made a lovely picture seated high upon the old mule's back. She wore no riding-habit; simply her pretty, pink, cotton frock which, with its frills and laces and coquettish Southern fixings, made a quaint effect. Her sun-bonnet, so much admired by Dinah, had slipped backwards and now hung loosely by its strings behind her, and one little foot could be seen half buried in its Mexican stirrups. Her head was slightly bent, and she did not see the stranger, who, at the sound of her approach,

stood still and watched her with delighted surprise. Just at this point the path was very narrow and closed in on one side by two immense pine trees, and on the other by a great boulder; the stranger leant up against this latter as she came towards him. Just as she had almost reached his side, the mule for the first time perceived him and began snorting, kicking, and rearing in the confined space. For an instant Kitty, too, was taken by surprise and was almost thrown. The stranger, not accustomed to the fine horsemanship of Southern girls, thought a catastrophe imminent, and sprang to her assistance, trying to clutch "Cleve's" bridle. This made the brute madder than ever; before his head could be seized he made a swerve, and, letting fly his heels, laid the stranger prone upon the grass beneath the pines. Kitty could not suppress a little cry as she saw her would-be rescuer lying so still with closed eyes, his hat off, and a thin stream of blood coming from beneath the wavy hair above his temple. She did not see all this at first, as "Cleve," rearing and kicking still, was almost unmanageable; but, finally, getting him under control, she dismounted, and went to the

injured man's assistance, He was unconscious. The brute had kicked him in the shoulder, and slightly grazed his head causing the blood to flow. This Kitty staunched with her handkerchief. Finding this too small with which to bind the head she made a compress of it, and then seeing that one of the pockets in the stranger's white flannel blazer contained one of silk, she drew it promptly forth, the shy colour mounting to her hair as she did so, and with it bound the little compress against the wound. Her patient, though young, was a large, heavy man, and the slender child found it almost impossible to move his head without assistance. His face, white to ghastliness, and disfigured by the bloodstain, shocked her by its immobility. She wondered what she had better do. If she had but water—anything with which to moisten his lips—but there was no water within a mile, and she felt afraid to leave him there alone. He might be robbed or killed outright for the handsome clothes and watch he wore. She saw he carried revolvers in his sash, and probably had money in his pockets. What could he be doing here, alone and a stranger, she wondered. Suddenly she noticed the gleam of a silver

flask amongst the grass. She reached for it and opening it, found it contained brandy. Slipping her slender arm beneath her companion's head, she strove to force some of the fluid between his lips; failing this, the girl, with ready wit, dipped her little finger into the cognac, and with it moistened the unresponsive mouth. Five minutes passed thus. The birds twittered overhead, the insects hummed around her and the detestable black mule could be seen at a distance quietly cropping the grass, unmoved at the sight of the mischief he had done.

.

The sun mounted slowly higher and higher to the zenith. The dew was gone and the summer's day drew out its length undisturbed, and exactly like the other summer's days which preceded, and would follow it. Little Kitty sitting there helpless, with her ghastly burden upon her knees, presently saw the old mule stop cropping, give himself a good shake, and then start off at a brisk trot towards home. This was a relief; she knew that succour would soon come. Presently where she sat, the sun mounting higher, pierced through the green

above them and came beating down upon the hurt man's face. It was very hot. This distressed Kitty. She could not move her patient, and she feared the power of the sun upon his already injured head. Slipping her arm from under his neck, she gently let it rest upon the grass, and, rising, took up a position upon his other side in a vain endeavour to screen him with her own body. This she found impossible as the sun's rays were almost perpendicular. Then she took her sun-bonnet, and with it, and some slender boughs, and the pretty white lace she wore about her shoulders, made some sort of shelter above the still face. Then she sat and waited, and time dragged wearily onwards. She had been so busy in her efforts to restore the injured man that she had not fully realised her position. Suddenly, with his face now hidden from her, a sense of terrible loneliness overpowered her, and she became horribly afraid. She saw before her his silent form motionless, his hands lying helpless, palm upwards, not a tremor, not a quiver, not the faintest sign of life. Horror, gasping, dry-throated horror seized her, and she felt as if she could not remain there another moment.

The very sunlight seemed clouded in her sight, and the soft whisperings of the trees overhead were changed to weird mutterings all around her. She knew that she was alone, and yet she was surrounded, suffocated with horror of the unknown. Springing to her feet, she tore the screen from before his face. She must see him, have the companionship of his unconscious presence, know he was not dead. The sun had passed onwards, and the shade had returned. The pathos of his drawn features appealed silently to her, and enabled her to regain some control over herself. She knelt down beside him, and again moistened his lips with the brandy, then she chafed his hands. As she did so, she noticed their fine form, and could tell that they had never been used to labour. Thus engaged in trying to restore him, she felt the situation become more endurable. She crouched closer to his side in the strange, indefinable terror which possessed her, and insensibly her little hand closed tightly over his. It was as if the living called upon the dead for aid. Bending over him thus, so close that her light breath fanned his face, she felt the fingers she held contract about her own, saw his eyelids

quiver, and heard his breath come with a heavy gasp.

“What is it?” he asked weakly, opening his eyes in a dazed manner, and looking up into the face bending so near his own.

“Oh, thank God! you are alive, and not really dead. I thought—” Kitty could get no further, she caught her breath, and then, covering her face with her hands, began to sob like the child she really was.

“You poor little creature, what is it?” Aroused by the sight of her grief, he tried to raise himself upon his elbow, but the pain of his shoulder overcame him, and, nearly fainting, he slid down again upon the grass.

“Give me a little cognac, please,” he whispered faintly. Kitty, ashamed of her weakness, drew her hands from her face, and, still hardly able to suppress her sobbing, again knelt beside him, and with an innocent lack of affectation, quietly slipped her arm beneath his head and put the cognac to his lips.

.

“Well, Kit, but this is a nice business. What have you and Nan done with the stranger? And what does the doctor say?”

Kitty's father passed his arm fondly round her, and drew her head upon his breast.

"Nan's there, dad. He fainted when the doctor was fixing his shoulder, but he's a heap better now, and they've given him something to make him sleep."

They were sitting in the porch on the old sofa, which, in summer time, was kept there for the comfort of the invalid master of the house. Kitty nestled closer to her father. She was tired, and the events of this long day had almost been too much for her. Presently she raised her head, and her usually dancing eyes looked solemnly into those of her father's.

"Do you know, dad," she said slowly, "I'm right glad they came when they did. I was beginning to feel as if I could not stay with him any longer when Pete and Aunt Nan and the others came riding up. My! but I gave 'Cleve' a beating coming home!"

CHAPTER III

WYNDHAM DE MONTFORT

“No, never from this hour to part,
We’ll live and love so true.”

OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

NEXT morning Wyndham de Montfort was aroused from his drugged sleep by the sounds of a sharp altercation going on outside his windows.

“I say, Unc’ Pete, yo’ doan’ know nuffin’ at all about it!”

“Maybe I doesn’t, Judy, but maybe I knows more dan yo’ contemplate ’bout it. Thar!”

“I guess not, Unc’ Pete, yo’ was all’ys makin’ up romances ’bout ebberyone, an’ doan’ yo’ know that a duke’s mighty like a king. He are not likely ter be cavortin’ all ober de lan’ by hisself; he was to wear a golden coronet, an’ take a crowd ob help aroun’ wif him, where eber he goes.”

“I knows that well ’nuf. But somethin’

might have happened ter separate him from his sweete. Didn't we both offen hear ole Aunt Mary read just that story 'bout a lord, or prince or something, gettin' out of his car'age for a minute, and then, right away, gittin' swallowed up by the darkness. I hab nebber forgot dat tale, it was fit ter make yo' blood cruddle." Here Unc' Pete gave a shudder, and chattered his teeth so that Wyndham heard him, and Judy, from shrill screams of anger, began to speak in a calmer voice.

"One thing, I sartin ob, Unc' Pete."

"Wot's dat?" Pete rubbed his chin with the back of his hand, screwing up his immense mouth as he did so.

"I'm perfec'ly sartin our Miss Kitty won't hab nuffin' ter say ter him, if he do turn out ter be a juke or any of them titles. She's dead sot agin all that sort o' trash; an' I doan' blame her seein' how cruel her 'ristercratic old gra'ma have allus bin ter Massa George, not eben comin' ter close her own pore chile's eyes when Kitty was born, and now wantin' pore Massa George ter give her up altergether, and let her leave him and go an' live 'mongst dem heartless folks in New York. No, nat'rally

Kitty's dead sot 'gaint goin' ter New York, an' leavin' Massa George, an' I reckon she'd be the first to put a juke out ob de house if she caught him in it."

Wyndham de Montfort could not help overhearing these observations, and smiled quietly as he listened.

"Dear little Kitty," he thought, "I feel I am indebted to her care, perhaps for my life, and no doubt she has a perfect right to have what opinions she sees fit regarding 'jukes' as that old black woman calls them. I wonder how long this confounded shoulder is going to keep me in my room." He winced as he moved slightly, and then concluded to lie still and wait for the coming of Aunt Nan and the doctor.

Presently the door opened quietly and old Pete appeared. "Good-mornin," sah. How's yo' ter day, sah?" Then he began busying himself in putting things to rights about the room. He brought a message from Aunt Nan to say she would arrive shortly with breakfast for the invalid. Wyndham recognised his voice and proceeded to interrogate him as to the accident of yesterday, and then quietly brought the conversation round to little Kitty. Old Pete could not say

enough in praise of her and of Massa George, her invalid father. Miss Nan came in for praise also, but in a somewhat modified form. Old Pete was a model servant both in appearance and manners, one of the few yet remaining from the old slave times "'fo' de warr" as he explained to the Englishman, telling of how he had been born, and reared, and lived always with the family.

"Why, sah, it's no wonder I loves our little Miss Kitty. I see'd her borned, an' carried Massa George in dese arms afore her. My, but he was a han'som gen'leman when he bid de ole massa good-bye an' went north ter New York. Ter see him now as he is, wid his healph ruined by dem injuries he got in de Charles'on earthquake, yo' wouldn't know him. He was down ter visit Massa Jack, who is his brother, an' is a big merchant in Charles'on; and just about de time dey was all goin' ter retire der came a tremenjous shaking ob de whole earf, and de houses begun to crack wif reports jest like pistols an' guns goin' off, and Massa George he rushed ter his brother's room, an' caught up de baby; an', jest as he war almost down de stairs, de wall on one side gabe way, an' fell,

an' caught him right 'cross his back, an' he had ter be dug out of de ruins. They found him 'most dead, but de little baby were protected by his body and de lowest stairs, and wasn't even scratched. Golly! but de Lawd gabe us a mighty shakin' up dat time; dey ses dey felt it eben up hear; but I was down t' Charles'on wid Massa George, an' I saw it all. The quality all rushin' out into de streets, many ob 'm didn't eben have der clothes on, an' de cryin' an' screechin' of de colo'r'd folks was drefful, dey thought de day of judgment was come; an' der was all de rich whites campin' 'bout in de streets, an' de ladies an' de white chil'ren wif nothin' ter cover dem; an' den de colo'r'd people, some of dem bad niggars got crazy an' begun hollerin' an' laughin' an' cursin'. I declar', sah, you'd a thought hell itself was loose, an' dey all 'roun' an' 'mongst de pore whites, an' doin' things as wud a made de debble hisself 'shamed, drinkin' an' goin' on, an' shoutin', cursin' an' dancin', an' singin' hymns, an' prayin' an' preachin' all at de same time. De whites an' de respectable colo'r'd people tried ter keep some kind ob order, but it warn't no manner ob use, fo'

der is a mighty lot ob bad niggers in Charles'on. Po' Massa George was a long time befo' dey could move him an' bring him up here, an' he hasn't been wuf anything eber since; and that is five yars ago, now, when Miss Kitty war only ten. De pore chile nearly broke her heart cryin' when dey brought back Massa George. I guess de Charles'on people 'ull nebber fergit dat fearful night, an' all de nights an' days dat foller'd after it, when dey war 'fraid ter go back into de crazy, cracked houses, an' had ter build tents of blankets an' carpets out in de streets fo' de pore white folks — delicate ladies an' little chil'ren. Fo' de first few nights dey did pretty well, but in de day it war awful hot, fo' de sun roasted 'em po' things, an' den in de end, 'fore dey could get de houses repaired, de rain came, an' den nat'rally foller'd — sickness, dysentery and pneumonia; an' dey war all sick an' dyin', whites an' color'd. De whites suffered wurst, as dey war rich folks an' 'customed ter fine livin' an' cumfo'ble houses; an' it war pitiful ter see de pore white ladies cookin' ober de fires dey made in de streets, an' tryin' ter nurse an' ten' de chil'ren, for de colo'r'd mammies had all run away an'

taken ter dansin', and prayin', an' cuttin' up wif de debble gen'rally. De white massas took turns watchin' obber de wimin and chil'ren, an' fore de houses; but it warn't much use; an' der was a pow'ful lot ob stealin' done at night by de wicked niggars, dat seemed as if dey had sold derselves ter de debble, an' went 'bout doin' all der mischief dey knew how. Oh, sah, I 'members all 'bout dat earfquake an' de bringin' home ob Massa George."

Just at this moment Aunt Nan entered, and with her a small darkie, helping carry De Montfort's breakfast. She was surprised to find her patient so well. He declared the pain in his shoulder was nothing, and that he would be up and about next day; but at this Nan smiled, and told him her brother, on his way down to breakfast, would look in and bid him welcome. Yesterday he had been carried insensible into the house, and, though its master had seen him, De Montfort had, as yet, not made the acquaintance of Kitty's father.

Aunt Nan was a born nuise, and delighted in her task of caring for this handsome invalid. She helped him with his breakfast. His left arm was, of course,

bandaged, and he laughed as he made clumsy efforts to help himself with his remaining hand.

He and Nan soon became warm friends, and she laughed and chattered to him as she aided him in feeding himself. She told him of her brother whom she adored; and of Kitty whom she had reared; and all about the fears she entertained that the child would be sent by her father to New York, in accordance with her maternal grandmother's demands, through a mistaken idea on her father's part that it would be for Kitty's future good.

The unromantic Englishman listened to all these stories with interest, wondering, meanwhile, when he should again see Kitty. The heroism shown by this child of Nature and the South was a revelation to him, accustomed as he was to the conventional restrictions of English society.

His thoughts wandered away from Nan's babble, and he lay dreamily trying to recall every slightest incident of yesterday, with Kitty's anxious face, in fancy, still bending above him. He felt again the firm grasp of her little hands as she tried to move his

head into a more comfortable position, and recalled the pretty puzzled look with which she replied to a weakly-paid compliment on his part with which he sought to show his gratitude, English fashion.

The language of flattery and pretence was not a part of Kitty's healthy Southern bring-up-ing. Absolutely unconscious and unaffected, she had gone to his assistance as she would have done to that of any old nigger around her father's plantation who might have happened to be in distress. The thought that he was a man, young and handsome, had not occurred to her. He was a fellow-being in sore straits, and that was enough for Kitty.

As he recalled his clumsily-paid compliment his face reddened, he wondered why he should feel so awkward in the presence of "this young savage"—as he loftily chose to consider her. When in London, or in English country houses, the girls would have esteemed themselves only too highly honoured to receive a word of praise from him, who, for some seasons past, had been considered the best *parti* in England. He remembered how every girl in the house would gather round him on

his return with the other men from shooting or hunting, and seem to hang upon his slightest word; or pretend to be diverted by his most stupid jokes. These latter he knew now to have been dull as his own fogs.

The bright Southern skies seemed to have had power to shed some rays of enlightenment into his egotistic mental atmosphere, and to pierce slightly the hitherto impregnable citadel of his contented self-esteem. From his babyhood, he had been surrounded by sycophants and flatterers, and, until now, it had never entered into the possibilities that he could discover himself to be less than perfect. Lying there, almost helpless, with old Pete and Aunt Nan tending him, he, for the first time in his life, perhaps, turned his thoughts inwards.

CHAPTER IV

TREACHERY

“Put down the passions that make earth hell!
Down with ambition, avarice, pride,
Jealousy, down! cut off from the mind
The bitter springs of anger and fear;
Down, too, down at your own fireside,
With the evil tongue and the evil ear,
For each is at war with mankind.”

ALFRED TENNYSON.

WYNDHAM, with his arm still bandaged, was being helped by Uncle Pete and Nan to descend the stairs, and, for the first time, join the family assembled below. He and Kitty's father had already gotten pretty well acquainted, and the invalid rather liked this unsought guest, whom chance had cast helpless upon his hospitality. With true Southern warmth Mr Fauntleroy grasped his guest's hand, and congratulated him upon his improved appearance. Wyndham was introduced to Mr Joe Barmore and his wife—young

people proud of their first baby, who sat crowing upon his mother's lap, and looking a ridiculous little picture of his father in miniature. Then Mr Fauntleroy introduced his niece, Bessie Barmore, very handsome, tall and stately—almost too much so for such a young girl. She was only eighteen, but with her fully developed figure, looked three-and-twenty. "Mighty elegant," she thought to herself, regarding him critically with her large round grey eyes. He felt the cool regard, and his impression of her was, that he had never seen so handsome a woman in his life. Then he turned his head in a vain search for Kitty. She was not in the room.

"She might have been here to welcome me, at least," he thought, and bit his lip, sulkily letting his eyes rest upon his plate. Bessie, opposite, with a jealous pang, noted the searching look and the disappointment which followed it. "Kitty, of course," she thought, "and, I don't suppose she will have the sense to appreciate him in the least."

At this moment the door communicating with the kitchen opened, and Kitty, her face a little flushed, entered, followed by Pete carrying a big dish of hot cakes. She came smil-

ing in as was her wont, and, nodding brightly to De Montfort, took her seat beside her father. Then, without further notice of the stranger, she quietly began attending to the needs of the invalid.

“Jove! she is lovely,” thought De Montfort as he watched her. “She beats any Yankee girl I have yet met. He had fallen into the common error of Englishmen, that of calling all Americans “Yankees.” “I wonder what Malcolm would think of her?”

At this moment a slow, heavy step made itself heard upon the verandah without.

“There’s Uncle Tom,” said Bessie. “I wonder if he has any letters for me?”

A shadow darkened one of the windows as the head and shoulders of a man leaned lazily into the room, his arms on the sill without.

“Any room for me at the table yet?”

“Yes, Uncle Tom; sit here.”

Kitty sprang up, and gathering her plate and other belongings together, carried them to a little side table, smiling brightly as she did so at the dark face bent upon her from the window.

“But you’re not through yourself, Kitty.” His eyes softened as he watched her.

“Oh, I’m going to finish with the children, Uncle Tom. Come right in,” she added, with a little gesture of command.

The heavy figure began to move itself slowly. As he passed from the window towards the garden door, Bessie called out,—

“Any letters for me, Uncle Tom?”

“You’d better look at them and see,” he answered, as he entered the room and walked slowly towards Kitty’s vacated seat. Passing Bessie, he stopped and tossed several letters on to the table beside her. Bessie’s fingers clutched them, and she greedily devoured their addresses with her eyes. Looking quickly through them, she drew out and set aside one with a little look of pleasure upon her usually gloomy, handsome face.

“Four for Mr de Montfort.” She smilingly handed them to Wyndham across the table. They had been re-directed from Charleston. Mr Fauntleroy had some newspapers and one letter.

“What’s in that letter, dad?” said Kitty, coming behind his chair and looking with a little anxious regard at the envelope beside his plate. She saw it was in the handwriting of her grandmother, and trembled to think what

the contents might be. She stood lost in thought behind her father, with her arm thrown around his shoulder, Uncle Tom quietly eating his fried chicken at her other side. De Montfort watched her, thinking what a delicious study she made. Her delicate youth and joyous young face in contrast with the older and world-worn faces of the two men.

“Never mind my letter, pet. Go and eat your breakfast.”

Mr Fauntleroy uneasily shifted his position a little, covering the letter with his newspapers, and quickly glanced at Aunt Nan. The face of that good soul reddened, and De Montfort wondered why he always found himself thinking of the full moon when he happened to look at her. He had a profound respect for Nan, and they two had become fast friends during his illness. He even fancied that Nan had a suspicion of his admiration for Kitty, and was not unwilling to encourage him in it.

Old Pete, too, never tired of singing Kitty's praises, and found himself frequently in the possession of odd half-dollars, which jingled happily against each other in his unaccustomed pockets. The old man was shuffling about

the room now, apparently changing the plates. He also was anxious to know whether his master had heard from New York. His curiosity was not gratified as, at this moment, Mr Fauntleroy arose, grasped his letter and papers nervously as he did so, and, with them, went off to his study, closing its door firmly behind him. Kitty, unnoticed, flushed as she glanced at kind old Nan. The eyes which met hers were soft and pitying, and the good creature trembled as she thought anew of the possibility of losing her darling.

Breakfast being over, De Montfort asked Nan's permission to open his correspondence. Bessie, long ago, without a word to anyone, had torn open her solitary letter, and, with her elbows firmly planted upon the table before her, had read it through. She smiled a little contemptuously as she came to the words, "I suppose you will forget old friends now that you have English lords and dukes staying in the house." "He is only a plain Mr," thought Bessie, glancing at Wyndham, "but he might be a king from his appearance."

Her eyes took on a dreamy softness as she watched him. Wyndham felt her frank regard but pretended to be unaware of it, keeping his

eyes fixed on Nan at the head of the table. Then he turned again to his letters, still apparently unconscious of Bessie's gaze. Kitty had disappeared. Presently the Englishman, relinquishing a letter he had been reading, said,—

“My friend will be happy to accept Mr Fauntleroy's kind invitation, and will be here this evening.”

He looked straight at Bessie with an amused expression. She had been very silent during breakfast. He had found it difficult to converse with her. For the first time in her life Bessie felt ill at ease. She had never been at a loss before. Naturally, being so handsome, she was greatly admired and her train of “beaux” comprised all the young men around that part of the country, and extended itself even to the Mississippi Bottom and down to New Orleans. In this wide court she had been queen, all her courtiers vying with each other in taking her “buggy-riding,” escorting her to ghost and surprise parties, picnics and “horseback-riding.” Bessie had taken this devotion as a matter of course, treating her cavaliers more as brothers than lovers, and showing preference to none. Ambition, though she was unconscious of it, was

the mainspring of her being, and she had accepted all this adoration with a half-contemptuous satisfaction—it seemed to her to foreshadow future infinitely greater triumphs. The idea of quietly marrying and settling down in this peaceful country life as her mother and grandmothers had done before her never seemed a possibility to her. Her home duties were entirely distasteful to her, and she performed them in a half-hearted, perfunctory manner, which naturally left much to be desired.

Now, for the first time, she met a thorough man of the world. Instinctively she perceived, without being able to define it to herself, that there was a wide difference between him and the young men she had been accustomed to dominate. His finished manners and easy bearing, a certain quiet reserve, where she had always been accustomed to frank avowal in conversation, made her less at ease in his presence. For the first time, with all her beauty, she began to understand that something was wanting. In a dim manner she realised that she was rough almost to rudeness; this only rendered her more awkward and defiant. She planted her elbows upon the table and watched Kitty with jealous eyes,

wondering what might be the difference between them, egotism preventing her from discerning that the key-note of Kitty's perfect grace and good-breeding lay in her absolute unselfishness, her devotion to the interest of others, and in a frank naturalness which won all hearts.

Wyndham's remark roused Bessie from her unpleasant reverie. Perceiving herself to be directly addressed, she smiled, blushed slightly, and said rather awkwardly,—

“Is he?”

Then she, with the aid of her hands against the table used as a lever, pushed backwards her chair with a discordant sound upon the uncarpeted wooden floor, rose, and went towards the door opening into the garden beyond. She was thinking, “I wonder if the other is like this one. He is mighty difficult to get along with.”

Wyndham, with a little bow to Nan, also rose and followed Bessie to the garden door.

“Would you like to come and look around?” said Bessie. “It isn't far to walk, and there are plenty of seats under the trees in the yard.”

Glancing across her shoulder, he saw Kitty

talking to old Pete. The latter was leading "Cleve" with a halter, and the three were going down the yard together. Bessie, her head turned towards him, saw his face change, and noted the gay ring in his voice as he replied formally,—

"With pleasure, Miss Barmore."

Then she saw Kitty in the distance as they turned to go slowly out of the house. "He must be in love with her already, little fool," she thought spitefully. Wyndham was too much engrossed in watching Kitty to perceive the heavy cloud which once more obscured Bessie's beauty. He found it somewhat difficult to walk over the uneven ground in his weak condition, and with regret perceived that Kitty, with her back towards him, was every instant going farther away. Seeing that in a moment she would turn through a gate into a field beyond, he called after her,—

"Miss Fauntleroy, will you not permit me to make a further acquaintance with that mule of yours?"

Bessie's face flushed, and she bit her lip.

At the sound of Wyndham's voice Kitty and old Pete turned, and the former said laughing,—

“Why, Mr de Montfort, surely you do not want to see ‘Cleve’ after all the mischief he has done you?”

“Oh, yes, I do,” answered Wyndham, letting his eyes rest delightedly upon her glad, young face. “And I mean to ride him, too,” he went on resolutely, “as soon as my shoulder will permit of it.”

Kitty looked at him as he said this, and a pitying expression came into her eyes as she saw how worn he appeared. His face was pale and haggard, and his shoulders stooped slightly from weakness. She said kindly,—

“Wouldn’t you like a seat, Mr de Montfort? Pete, go fetch a chair.”

“Mr de Montfort was walking well enough, Kitty; I don’t suppose he will thank you to think him so sick,” broke in Bessie, with a little toss of her head, and a contemptuous look at Kitty. “You are always wanting to fuss over somebody.”

Kitty, taken aback at this rudeness, looked with surprise at her cousin, and Wyndham forgot to make any protest as he watched her, and thought what an enchanting picture she made, with her arm through the halter of the wicked black mule, who stood innocently behind

her, munching a mouthful of grass he had managed to crop, unobserved, as old Pete, going for the chair, had transferred him to Kitty's keeping. Bessie, seeing Kitty's eyes questioning her, and wishing to break up the interview, added,—

‘I believe Aunt Nan is hunting you, Kitty, you had better go up to the house. Something about your grandmother's letter, I guess.’

Poor little Kitty's face changed at these last words, her brows seemed to lose their arch, and drew nearer together, and a pained expression gathered about her mouth. Her eyes turned uneasily towards the windows of her father's study. Casting the halter to Pete, who had returned with a chair, she said,—

“You get ready, Pete. I must go along up to the house first. Do sit down,” she continued kindly, turning towards De Montfort with a smile, solicitude for his comfort for the moment making her forget her own uneasiness.

Wyndham sank into the seat with a little air of relief, first turning it, so that it would face the road which Kitty must take to the house, and thanking her for her thoughtful care of him, in a manner which, to Bessie's jealous hearing, appeared unnecessarily cordial.

Kitty answered his speech with a little anxious smile, and settling her pretty sun-bonnet over her face, flew off across the yard.

“I wonder how long he intends to sit there staring after her,” thought Bessie, as she stood moodily beside him, while he watched the childish figure flying, her pink draperies fluttering, and long golden hair fallen about her, carrying with it the sun-bonnet, which, as usual, would not stay upon her head. He continued to sit for some moments longer, his eyes fixed upon the open door by which she had disappeared into the house; then recollecting himself, turned with an apology to Bessie, and feebly rising from his chair, said,—

“I fear I am tiring you, Miss Barmore, with my invalid ways. You must kindly pardon me. Suppose we go over there, and sit in the shade.’ He pointed with his stick to a bench beneath the trees, and then walked slowly towards it with her. She was thinking,—

“He must be very rich. I daresay he is even richer than the duke. I wish it wasn’t Kitty he is after, but I’ll get him from her yet.” Her eyes shone strangely as this thought flashed by her. Feeling Wyndham’s eyes upon her she relaxed her brows and smiled.

"Kitty is only a mere child," she said; "I always feel sorry that she is engaged to be married." She noted his change of expression, which he could not conceal from her. Not wishing to go into explanations, she went on quickly, "It is a sore subject in the family; we never mention it, but she seems determined when she is of age to go against everyone's advice and marry him."

"Whom?"

De Montfort's throat felt dry as he spoke the word.

At this moment a sound of footsteps running made both quickly turn their heads.

"Miss Bessie, Jake's hyar, and Miss 'Liza hab sent ober fo' dem pickles yo' done promis' her when yo' las' was ober dere. Miss Nan's done bin huntin' all ober the place fo' dem, and done sent me ter as' yo.' 'Cuse me, sah."

Here Pete made a grandiose bow to Wyndham and then stood in an attitude of expectation, his great hands pendant on either side of him, and his big round eyes fixed upon Bessie. She hesitated a moment, and then remembering the directness of De Montfort's last question, decided to return with Pete to the house.

De Montfort, left alone, thought angrily of what he had just heard. "Kitty engaged." "That child." "And who was the fellow?" Already, under her gentle exterior, he could perceive the force of character she possessed.

Pete had told him that the Fauntleroy's were in some manner connected with the Lee family. Kitty's grandfather had impoverished himself in the Southern cause, and had been the near friend, and one of the bravest generals of the "Idol of the South." Old Pete himself had wanted to go with him when the war broke out, but, instead, his master had ordered him to remain and take care of his women-folk, knowing the faithful stuff of which Pete's heart was made. Then the brave Southern had gone forth, accompanied by his three sons, very young men at that time, leaving his wife and three little girls behind him. Old Pete, with tears streaming down his cheeks, had to commence his duties of guardian and protector by receiving in his arms the inanimate form of his beloved mistress, who had fainted as her brave husband strained her for the last time to his breast, leaning down from his saddle.

It was a pitiful group he gazed upon as he said good-bye for the last time to his

home. In the foreground the poor wife, her beautiful face changed by the watching and anxiety of many weary weeks of terrible suspense, all wet with tears fallen back upon the breast of good old Pete, and now calmly unconscious as if death had mercifully closed her eyes to the greater disasters which were to follow; her little children clinging about her skirts, crying in sympathy, child-like, at a scene they were unable to understand; and in the background grouped about upon the wide porch and the steps ascending to it, the weeping slaves surrounding the invalid chair of his aged mother, beside whom stood, trembling, and endeavouring to console her, for the loss of their son, his old father, fragile in health but strong in heart, choking the sobs in his voice, and dashing away with the back of his thin sensitive hand the tears which would come, forced down his cheeks by the sight of his family's misery, and the painful sense of his own age and feebleness, which prevented him from going out at the head of the males of his house, to lead them on to the defence of his country, and the maintenance of what, to him, were her just rights in a war of unjust aggression.

De Montfort, seated beneath the old trees in the yard, and looking towards that same porch, where, at this moment, old Pete passed, thought of Kitty and Kitty's character, and recalled these scenes which the good old slave had recounted to him many a time in the closing darkness of a long summer's evening to while away his wearing hours of pain. As he thought his heart became more bitter.

A noble history, a noble mate, descendant of a noble line of ancestors, come with untarnished name from the old world—his own world—in days now old. Kitty, "his Kitty;" he had come to think her his wife when he should choose to make her so, as he had assured himself with the calm arrogance of a man for whom the world had always given its best, and who had yet to meet with his first denial. His Kitty promised to another, and, worse still, determined with all the strength of her warrior blood to keep her faith with this unknown and now detested rival. Who was he? What must he be to have merited the love and devotion of her, for whom he himself now felt spurred by the unexpected obstacle in his path, that nothing would be too difficult of conquest.

The wind moved the leaves with a delicious whispering sound above his head, and should have soothed him with their lullaby. The sun had changed his position in the heavens, and great, soft clouds now and again obscured the brightness of his smiles as they appeared over the tops of the mountains to his right, and sailed slowly away to the horizon where "Old Pisgah" raised his magnificent head, monarch amongst all the spreading ranges of lesser giants which surrounded him.

De Montfort sat on, unseeing. Bitter thoughts for the first time assailed him, and his face wore a stern expression.

The luncheon bell was rung by a tattered nigger, who was old Pete's lieutenant about the house, and who suddenly appeared on the porch, and seemed to delight in the hideous din he made.

The bell roused Wyndham from his unpleasant thoughts; he raised his head and saw good old Pete, in his neat butler's suit of frayed black, coming to take him back to the house.

CHAPTER V

PERIL

“The moon is up in splendour,
And golden stars attend her ;
The heavens are calm and bright ;
Trees cast a deepening shadow,
And slowly off the meadow
A mist is rising silver-white.”

MATTHIAS CLAUDIUS.

WYNDHAM had requested to be allowed to accompany Pete to the depot to meet the train by which his friend was to arrive. He had not seen Kitty since his discovery of the morning, having pleaded fatigue and gone to his room rather than join the family at luncheon, which was, in reality, the family dinner.

Aunt Nan had come to his room as usual to superintend the comfort of her patient. Looking at her honest round face, he felt inclined to ask her all about Kitty's engagement, then, with the morbid self-consciousness and cold reserve habitual to an Englishman,

he finally determined to say nothing. Now, sitting beside old Pete, he drove slowly to the depot to meet his friend.

The sleepy little depot lay low beside the churning waters of the red French Broad. The sun was setting, and sent his rays slant-wise through the trees. There had been a sudden mountain summer thunder-shower; it had refreshed the earth, and left every separate leaf and blade of grass gleaming and glittering as with a myriad diamonds, bathed in the golden light. The air was clear and very fresh, and filled with a thousand odours of the wetted trees and plants. The leaves seemed touched by a magic wand, and took on delicate tints not before observable, and the drenched golden-rods lifted their tall heads and once more backgrounded themselves with exquisite effect against the masses of deep red sumach.

Boundless America painfully seeking amongst the artificial, because cultivated, flowers of a worn-out civilisation, for a national floral emblem, is a sight to be regretted, when everywhere the golden-rod waves in her breezes, north, south, east and west. Growing wild and free in every dell, on every

mountain side, Nature herself seems to have chosen it as the fitting emblem of an untrammelled and glorious people.

Old Pete drove slowly, and Wyndham had time to observe the beauty of the country through which they were passing. He was a lover of scenery, and these magnificent mountains sitting about the feet of greater Pisgah appeared to him giant brothers holding everlasting conclave. Gazing at them, he imagined the death-like peace and solitude of their peaks. This unspeakable peace which had endured undisturbed since the beginning, "before men were," and which would endure till the end, till long after the nations of the earth, struggling at their feet in unending pain and misery, should have passed away and become as dreams. The sun sunk slowly behind the mountains, leaving a trail of gold and crimson to mark his path. Softly this faded away, the breeze died, and delicious stillness reigned; evening had come, peaceful harbinger of night.

The old buggy creaked onwards, its groanings, and the steady tread of the aged white horse were the only sounds which disturbed the silence. De Montfort watched the stars come

out one by one; it was growing dark and the buggy jolted more than before, as Pete was no longer able to see the ruts in the narrow track, called by courtesy a road. Far down in the distance they could discern the depot lights, and now and again the bell of a freight engine made itself heard. It was a melancholy sound, and did not tend to cheer Wyndham's spirit. He began to wish he had not come. The drive was a long one, and the buggy and roads hardly suited to his weak condition. Old Pete tried once or twice to enter into conversation, but De Montfort's mood was taciturn, and he found little encouragement to continue, and relapsed into silence.

.
"Hullo, old fellow!"

"Why, how are you, old boy?"

The two friends met on the rough side track of the depot. Malcolm Fairleigh looked at his friend as they stood beneath the lamp outside the door of the little office.

"You look weak, Wyndham; take my arm." The speaker was hardly more than a boy, and his fair skin made him appear even younger than he really was. "You must have had a

pretty bad accident," he added, with solicitude, as Wyndham leant heavily upon him, and they turned their steps towards the buggy.

"Yes, I suppose it was," said De Montfort, quietly; "had that mule kicked a little more directly I daresay it would have been all up with my head, and me, too."

"Why didn't you let me know sooner? I would gladly have changed my plans and come over and looked after you."

"Oh, I didn't want to spoil your sport, and the people up there were very kind. Charming people, in fact," he added, upon reflection.

By this time they had reached the buggy, and old Pete got down to assist Wyndham to enter it. The long homeward journey commenced, and the friends discussed family and other events which had transpired since their parting, Fairleigh to go to White Sulpher Springs, and Wyndham to make his memorable walking tour, which, for him, had ended so disastrously.

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The buggy had entered the yard, and the tired old white horse was toiling steadily up one side of the sweeping carriage drive. Lights

could be seen in the lower rooms, and the murmur of voices reached the occupants of the buggy from the porch.

Wyndham turned towards his friend under the clear starlight, and whispered anxiously,—

“You will keep my secret, old boy? I don’t suppose it— Well, prejudices must be respected, you understand.”

He could not see the slight frown which drew Malcolm’s brows together as he gave the required promise, and hastily sprang to the ground.

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An hour later they were all seated at supper. Bessie had placed Malcolm at her side, and talked determinedly to him. He, considering her very handsome, was nothing loath to be amused. Wyndham, sitting opposite, wondered what they found to laugh over, and watched the tender manner in which Kitty anticipated the needs of her father. A high-hung lamp shed its rays over the young girl’s head, and brought out the warm tints in her glorious hair. Once, feeling his eyes upon her, she looked up with a child-like smile, saying,—

“I hope you are not too tired, Mr de Montfort, after your long drive?”

She waited for his response with her sweet eyes fixed upon his face. Wyndham felt the blood throb in his temples under her frank regard.

"You are very kind, Miss Fauntleroy. I suppose I cannot expect to feel like myself just at present. It is a new sensation for me not to be able to stand a two hours' drive," he added, with slight bitterness.

Kitty's sympathetic ear noted the tone, and her eyes rested still upon his face with a pitying look.

"You will very soon be strong again," she said. Then she blushed, for she found Malcolm's eyes fixed upon her. He was thinking, "Wyndham's right, she is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen."

"What did you do with that beast to-day?" Wyndham hastened to ask, fearing to lose her attention. "You surely did not ride him?"

He had seen her blush and discerned its cause, and for the first time in his life felt an insensate desire to knock Malcolm down.

"Why, of course I rode him," laughed the girl. "I went over with old Jake to see grandma, and then I came back home alone."

Wyndham thought of the sheltered lives of

his sisters, and shuddered at the idea of little Kitty alone on that long lonely ride. Looking across at Mr Fauntleroy, he asked him if he did not think it dangerous for her thus to ride by herself. His host replied with a smile, and did not seem to think there was any reason for fear.

"Kitty has always gone about alone, everybody knows her, and, I may say, loves her too," her father went on, fondly stroking the bent head beside him.

Kitty was blushing again, for this conversation had drawn all the eyes around the table upon her. Wyndham wished he had not spoken, and Fairleigh watched the blood coming and going in the lovely young face, with admiration. Bessie, seeing this, thought, "I suppose he's going to make a fool of himself, next," and relapsed into a sulky silence.

Wyndham, regretting the discomfort his solicitude for her had caused Kitty, turned the conversation into another channel by asking Mr Fauntleroy if there were any hunting in the mountains round. This brought up many stories of bears, wild-cat, and other smaller game, and Kitty was permitted to remain quietly silent at her father's side.

Presently there was a general pause, and Bessie, to break it, turned to Fairleigh and said,—

“I suppose you saw the duke when you were in Charleston?”

Everyone looked towards them. Wyndham cast a sharp glance at his friend, and the latter answered, rather awkwardly,—

“Everyone must have seen him who happened to be there when he was.”

“But did you know him?” persisted Bessie.

“Yes; we were at Eton together.”

“Then you must really know him,” exclaimed Bessie, now intensely interested. “Oh, do tell me about him? What is he like? Is he young and good-looking?”

Before Malcolm could reply, Mr Joe Barmore broke in with a laugh, and said,—

“I guess you’d like to be a duchess yourself, Bess. Why didn’t you go down to Charleston and take your chance of him along with the rest of the girls?”

“Oh bother! Uncle Joe, you’re always saying something hateful.”

Bessie had coloured deeply with anger, and darted a glance of contempt at Joe as he went on,—

“I must say I can’t see the difference between a duke and anyone else ; I guess I am as good as this duke any day.”

“Except that you haven’t his millions,” interrupted Bessie, with a slight sneer. Then Mrs Joe looked at her husband affectionately and then hugged the baby closer to her breast.

Wyndham had sat very still during this conversation. He began to perceive that even a simple American country girl sometimes has her ideas as to rank and wealth. He turned his eyes quietly upon Kitty, longing to know her thoughts at this juncture. She sat with her hand in that of her father, and gazed steadfastly at Bessie. At this moment her father said teasingly,—

“Kitty here will give us a lecture upon dukes. She once heard terrible tales of one from an old Irish woman who had been forced to emigrate on account of her master, the duke, insisting upon collecting his rents at rare intervals, which did not meet the old lady’s approval at all. Kitty, would you marry a duke if he asked you?”

The pretty skin had been glowing and paling all through her father’s banter. She was thinking less of the old woman’s stories than of all

she feared at the hands of her grandmother, whose pet idea it was to bring her out in New York society, upon the occasion of this same duke's appearance there next winter after his tour in the West. Unused to hating anyone, she had at last come to think of this man with absolute detestation. Wyndham watched her face grow set and resolute, when, upon her father's insistence, she was forced to make some reply.

"Father, don't make me talk of that man, you know how I hate him."

Her father shrank a little before the look in her now serious eyes ; he felt guilty for the first time in his life of siding with others against her, and recalled the letter he had written in reply to that of her grandmother that morning. In it he had at last promised to let Kitty go to New York, but only for the one winter. He had not yet found courage to tell her of what he had done, and knowing how bitterly set against the scheme she was, he wondered if he could ever persuade her to consent. Even good old Nan did not know yet. He felt his sister suspected his defection to the enemy that day, for the excellent creature had gone about all the afternoon with

an unaccustomed air of melancholy, and he had caught her more than once furtively wiping her eyes, behind the kitchen door, upon the corner of her apron. Seeing Kitty's distress, she now came to her rescue by rising and saying to her,—

“Come, Kitty, Aunt Judy's sick, and if we don't set that dough, I guess there won't be any hot cake to-morrow morning.”

Kitty jumped up with an air of relief. As they passed into the kitchen she wound her arms about Nan's comfortable waist, and, almost crying, said,—

“Oh, Nan, what has gotten hold of dad? I believe he's bewitched, and I know he has promised to send me, because I saw him come out and give Pete a letter, just before Pete drove off to the depot. I know he's done it,” the tears half-choked her. “Oh, Nan, Nan, what shall I ever do in New York, away from you!”

They were both crying now. The girl thrown upon the elder woman's breast, and sobbing violently; Nan weeping more quietly. To both it was a new experience in their hitherto untroubled lives.

Beside the kitchen table they remained,

unaware that the strong light of the paraffin oil lamp made them visible from the porch. Wyndham standing there, was a pained spectator of the scene. He longed to be able to comfort Kitty, and cursed his impotence to do so. To him in these few short weeks she had become all and all; but his good sense told him that he, for her, was no more than any of the others whose lives revolved around her. She was still a child. Ideas of love and marriage had never even intruded themselves upon her innocent mind. He saw her now, weeping on Nan's expansive breast, as a child might who was told she must leave the freedom of her nursery for the sterner duties of school life. He stood thus absorbed in the picture before him, when Bessie, moving quietly, came and placed herself at his side. Immediately she grasped the whole situation, and lost no time in turning it to her own account.

"I wonder Nan encourages Kitty in her nonsense about that low man," she said, with a sneer.

Wyndham started, turned and walked some steps back towards the door. He realised that Bessie was, for some reason, unsym-

pathetic towards poor little Kitty, and it distressed him to think that she should have witnessed this scene. At the same time her words stung him again into jealous torture. He had forgotten. Kitty's innocent presence had seemed so utterly child-like as to have power to obliterate all the painful thoughts, which, since the morning, had been tormenting him. Now they returned with redoubled force. "What if it were truth? Could it be, that, instead of the girlish creature she appeared, she was really a wilful, disobedient daughter, set upon defying her father, and determined to marry this man at all costs — 'that low man.'" The shock and revulsion which Bessie's words caused him made him for a moment forget her presence there beside him. She, perceiving with triumph the effect her words had taken upon him, was about to follow up her advantage, when Malcolm mounted the steps from the yard where he had been smoking and said lazily,—

"Why, I have been looking for you, Wyndham. Excuse me, Miss Barmore, I didn't see you there in the dark," he added, as he perceived Pessie standing within the shadow. He, too, had seen Kitty weeping on Nan's breast,

and wondered what it all meant. By this time the rest of the family had left the supper-room. Old Pete made his appearance in the kitchen, and Kitty ran off to her room followed by Nan.

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“I am afraid, Nan, we must let Kitty go for at least one winter.” Mr Fauntleroy spoke in an apologetic tone, and looked up deprecatingly into the questioning eyes of good Nan, who had come into his study to ascertain the worst next morning.

“It will break the child’s heart, brother George, and then you will only have yourself to thank,” Nan spoke in solemn tones. “I wish it had only been Bessie,” she went on; “she would have enjoyed it.” She had little affection for her other niece.

“Well, sister Nan, I have finally made up my mind that it is for Kitty’s best advantage, and bitterly as it will distress me to let her go, I mean to do so next October. You had better get the dear child what clothes she will need and set about making preparations right away.”

Brother George spoke with authority, and when he did so, which was seldom, as he was

a very easy-going man, Nan knew it was useless to dispute his will. Without another word she turned and sadly left the study. Kitty did not cry when she heard the news from Nan, though her heart ached sadly for her father. She dreaded leaving him alone, for she knew no one could take her place at his side. She appreciated the sacrifice he was making for her supposed good. She considered he was mistaken, but having used all her arguments in vain before his resolution was taken, now that she found it was final she determined to bear her own trouble bravely, in order to comfort him in what she knew must be a bitter trial to himself. Except for a day or so, when he went to Charleston before his accident, they had never been parted since they had carried him back disabled to his house; here, in the mountains, he had remained, confined to his own grounds, an invalid, but always uncomplaining and cheerful.

Kitty found the prospect of leaving him a very bitter one. She and Nan sat for some time silent in the sun outside the kitchen door, and the breakfast china remained untouched upon the bench where it was always washed. The steaming water, prepared for the purpose,

grew tepid, and still poor Nan sat and wrung her hands.

“If your grandma would only let me go too, Kitty,” she moaned at last.

“No, dear Aunt Nan, that would never do. You know I should die if I did not know that you were here to take care of poor dad.” Her soft eyes grew humid as she thought of him alone without his constant companion, herself. She knew Nan was the best of creatures, but she was well aware that even Nan could not fill her own vacant place at her father’s side.

“Lor’! Miss Nan, what’s dar matter? Yo’ bin done sittin’ there an hour, and all der water’s cole. An’ Miss Kitty too! Mighty! but—”

“Never you mind, Pete, go and get some more water.”

Kitty roused herself, tossed back the heavy golden masses of her hair, and rising, went with a weary air towards the bench where the china stood piled up. Usually Aunt Nan performed this duty, but now she sat listless, unable to rouse herself from her despondency at the loss of her pet, and on Pete’s making his appearance, a few minutes later with the

hot water, she sat on, letting Kitty busy herself with the china, unaided.

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A week had passed. Wyndham found himself recovering his former health, and Malcolm Fairleigh, with his youthful face and pleasant ways, had begun to endear himself to all. Even in this short time he had made the acquaintance of most of the family friends and neighbours, and he and Bessie were much thrown together. They were always partners at croquet, which is a favourite pastime in the South, and rode side by side for many a long mile together, when she took him to make the acquaintance of far-off neighbours. Malcolm would have preferred Kitty as his constant companion, but Bessie arranged otherwise, and it came to be regarded as a matter of course that she and Malcolm should be partners at all friendly gatherings. Uncle Tom began to chaff her about the young Englishman in his slow, good-natured way. One morning he came into the dairy before breakfast, and found Bessie setting the cream; he handed her a letter which he had brought over from the town,

“I guess that’s from Willie Bell, isn’t it, Bess? What are you going to do about him now you have the young Englishman come courting you?”

“Wait till he does come courting me, Uncle Tom,” replied the girl, saucily. “I don’t half-believe he knows how. I gave him a chance to sit out with me on the porch last night and he didn’t seem to understand, and when the others said good-night, he rose and did the same, and went off to smoke his last cigar with Mr de Montfort.”

Uncle Tom laughed heartily at this, and, on the whole, considered the Englishman wanting in spirit. The truth was that Malcolm was entirely unused to Southern manners. The idea of one of the young ladies sitting alone on the porch with him after the family had retired would have appeared to him most extraordinary and impossible, as, indeed, it must to every thinking person. He had, therefore, yet to be initiated.

Bessie was in high spirits. A straw ride was in prospect that evening, the moon being full, and she, together with all the other

young people of the neighbourhood, was elated, at the promise of a lovely night given by the unclouded brightness of a glorious summer's morning.

“Uncle Tom, take your finger out of that cream,” she cried joyously. “You get out of here, now, I want to shut the door.”

She had forgotten the letter which he had brought her, leaving it beside the bowl of new set milk. Uncle Tom overturned the three-legged milking-stool upon which he had seated himself in his effort to obey her, and, as he turned to pick it up, he perceived the letter.

“What Bess! you—you don't even care to read poor Will's letter?” he said, interrogatively as he took the letter in his hand and followed her to the door with it.

“Oh bother! give it me, Uncle Tom.” He looked at her in surprise, as he handed it to her. Will and he had been at school together, and were close friends still; the younger man making his way in Texas was looked upon with great admiration by poor old Tom, whose slower wit had left him contented to remain buried amongst the mountains, pursuing the quiet, uneventful routine

of a country lawyer's life.— Now he looked almost sadly at Bessie as he said,—

‘I’m sorry to see your forgetting poor Will, Bessie. You used to think if you could get grandmother to let you have five hundred dollars to set up store, here in the town, you two would be married and be as happy as the day was long. He must be a right good business man to have got the position he has in Texas. A flash of enthusiasm momentarily illumined Uncle Tom’s handsome brown eyes, so deep set in his dark regular face as to appear almost cavernous. He heaved a little sigh of perplexity as he saw Bessie’s pout and frown at the memories his words recalled. Passing his hand through his thick black hair he went on, rather timidly, “I don’t half believe that Englishman is in earnest, Bessie; to my mind, if he is in love with anybody it’s with Kitty, there.” He nodded his head in the direction of the house. They were standing outside the buildings in the rear which had once been the slave quarters, now used for various purposes as offices. Bessie’s face clouded even deeper, and she rattled her keys fiercely as she closed the milk-room door.

“I thought the other one was in love with

her," she exclaimed roughly, turning round on Uncle Tom.

"I guess he may be, but that doesn't prevent this one doing the same thing."

Uncle Tom's unexpected logic surprised himself almost as keenly as it astonished Bessie. She had never perceived this possibility before. She had taken it for granted that, if De Montfort admired Kitty more than herself, Malcolm, at least, would be left for her. She felt humiliated—she who, until now, had been queen. And for Kitty! What was there in that child that both these men should thus admire her? She failed to find an answer to this question, and ended by hating Kitty the more.

Uncle Tom, watching her, was puzzled. She had always been a favourite of his, and he had looked upon it as settled that she would marry Will Bell sometime in the indefinite future. Little Kitty he considered a child. Walking by Bessie's side towards the house, from which the tones of the breakfast bell reached them, he tried to think out in his slow way what it all might mean.

"You haven't even yet opened that letter, Bessie." He approached the subject gingerly.

"I wonder if Bell is coming up here this summer?"

His words suggested another train of thought to Bessie's perturbed mind. Arresting her steps immediately, she hastily tore open the letter. Glancing quickly through it, she said,—

"He will be up some time this month."

Then, not waiting to tell Tom more, she turned and went quickly into the house.

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Breakfast was over, and De Montfort watched Kitty bring the children and seat them at their meals, attending to their wants herself. He remained, half in and half out of the window, chatting to her and the little ones. These latter, Joe Barmore's wife's nieces and nephews sent up for the summer from the Mississippi Bottom, stood somewhat in awe of the grave Englishman; Malcolm was their favourite of the two.

Kitty had, as aide-de-camp, the sturdy nigger child. This latter, no bigger herself than the eldest of the children, gravely apportioned out to the clamorous group what of broken victuals there might be remaining from the repast of the seniors.

“Oh, Kitty ! say Kitty !” Here commenced a tremendous thrashing of the table with a knife and fork, “Kitty !” Kitty’s attention was attracted to his direction by the din, and she turned her head, throwing back her curls with a characteristic gesture, and displaying the delicate nape of her white neck. De Montfort’s face flushed as he saw its beautiful lines revealed. “Kitty, I say ! Why is it that there’s never anything but drumsticks left for us ? Drums and old bits of skins. I b’lieve you eat it all Lu-lu, before we can get in.”

Here the speaker flashed a glance of animosity at the coloured child, who, at this moment, gravely took up a “drum” with her fingers, and, unmoved by the unfriendliness of his tones, put it upon his plate.

“You shouldn’t find fault, Johnnie.”

This came in Kitty’s sweet tones. She had just set the baby up in a high chair. De Montfort had grown silent in the midst of the clamour, content to watch the graceful figure of the young girl as she moved around the table. The scene suggested to his mind another possible picture, far off in the future ; his thoughts flew to it hungrily ; he did not flatter himself, but wondered humbly whether

such happiness could ever possibly be in store for him. He knew that, thus far, he had not made the faintest impression upon Kitty's affections. She regarded him simply as her father's guest. She even seemed more in sympathy with Malcolm; this tormented him, for he was aware of his friend's warmly expressed admiration for her. "They are both so young," he thought, "perhaps that is the secret."

Perhaps it was.

That day at dinner, Tom, who had as usual been over to the town, announced that two Italians, engaged in the erection of the gigantic new hotel on the hill beyond it, had had a quarrel and almost knifed each other to death. Aunt Nan shivered as Tom told the details. Mr Fauntleroy spoke with regret of the changes made by speculators in these quiet country parts, which some of the wealth of New York was being used to turn into a health resort. The improvements would, later probably, make him a rich man, by causing his property to augment in value. Nevertheless he was sorry to see the face of the country changed, new habits and manners imported, and new and luxurious needs created. De Montfort, who had been all over

the world, and much in Italy, regretted the necessity for the importation of Italian labour, as introducing an element of lawlessness in this hitherto peaceful community. He begged Kitty to promise him she would not ride again alone to her grandmother's.

"I am always at your disposition and only too delighted to accompany you, if you will only permit me to do so, Miss Kitty." He had fallen into the habit of addressing her thus, by her Christian instead of her surname, after the manner of Pete and the other servants. It seemed to him to bring her nearer to him. All the young people here, quickly upon making acquaintance, called one another simply by their first names—formality and artificiality were unknown amongst them.

Kitty looked up smiling, meeting the intense regard of his grey eyes with innocent frankness.

"You know grandmother's is out in the other direction. I am not afraid. Those people are fond of stealing things, and they would know I had nothing even if they did see me."

"Yes, but—"

De Montfort did not continue, but he determined to enter into an understanding with Pete, later, on the subject.

Presently Uncle Tom, laying down his knife and fork, said,—

“I had a pretty hard time getting that other span from Jim Walters.” He said ‘they’d be too tired after the ploughing.’ However, I took him out and gave him a drink, and he promised to let me have them if we didn’t work them too hard. He couldn’t let me have the two mules, because ‘Topsy’s’ sick, but I got his old black horse to come along instead of her, and now that makes six we shall have, and the big waggon from Tom Williams. I told Pete to see that there’s heaps of straw laid down in it. The waggon will be along about six o’clock with Jones’s two beasts. I think maybe he’d like it better if we let his man drive us,” he added, as an afterthought.

“Better, perhaps,” said Mr Fauntleroy, quietly.

“I am most anxious to become initiated into the mysteries of a ‘straw-ride’ Miss Barmore,” said Malcolm, gaily. “I should think it must be great fun. I shall write to my people in England and tell them about it. I wish my little sister Maud were here.” He glanced over at Kitty as he said this, and saw that she was apparently listening with interest. “She is

hardly grown up yet, Miss Fauntleroy, and I think you and she would be great friends."

"Yes, Kitty is nothing but a baby," came spitefully from Bessie. Uncle Tom's words of the morning recurring to her mind. She thought she beheld a special meaning in Malcolm's blue eyes as they remained centred upon Kitty.

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"I think you needn't pretend to be so innocent. If I were you I should feel too mean if I encouraged two men at once to come courting me; taking them away from other people, too, when you can't marry them both, either."

"Bessie!" cried Kitty, "what do you mean?"

She stood with her eyes wide open, gazing in pained surprise at her cousin. Bessie had confronted her, after dinner was over, upstairs, near her bedroom door, in a little passage which led past their rooms.

"What do I mean? You know very well what I mean! I suppose it pleases you to have two men mad about you at once. Perhaps you will find yourself left after all, though, with all your schemes!"

"Let me pass, Bessie," said Kitty with

dignity. She felt the hot tears gathering to her eyes, and did not wish the other to see them. "Let me past!"

Bessie, instead of doing so, continued to upbraid her, placing herself full in her path.

"Everybody is talking about the way you are going on," she said coarsely; "Uncle Tom spoke of it this morning, and—"

"Uncle Tom!" Poor Kitty's pained tones told Bessie how well she had aimed.

"Yes, Uncle Tom, and when *he* sees anything it must be plain indeed. He told me he was afraid these two rich Englishmen were just amusing themselves with you" — Kitty shivered—"making game of you to pass the time," she went on brutally.

Kitty, with her pained eyes fixed upon Bessie's face, had grown whiter and whiter during this speech; Bessie was too furious to observe the change in her. Suddenly, as the last abominable sentence was spoken, Kitty staggered, felt helplessly in the air with her poor little hands, as if blindly trying to save herself, and then fell senseless upon the floor. Bessie, completely surprised, did nothing for a moment; then, perceiving that the girl had really fainted, stooped down, and roughly

shook her by the shoulder, calling upon her to get up. She was now thoroughly frightened at the result her words had effected; especially as, at this moment, she heard De Montfort's footsteps coming along the adjoining corridor on his way to his own room. He could not fail to see Kitty here, she knew, and she bitterly regretted the steps she had taken. De Montfort's quick ear had heard Bessie's voice urging Kitty to get up, before the former had known of his approach. Thinking to save the situation, by dragging Kitty into her own room, Bessie stooped over her, and tried to raise her in her arms. At this moment De Montfort appeared at the other end of the passage.

"Good God! what is it, Miss Barmore?" he exclaimed, in a low voice, coming forward.

"Nothing," answered Bessie. "I suppose Kitty has fainted from the heat."

"Poor, dear little girl," interrupted Wyndham.

"Or, perhaps, she has been worrying herself more than usual," Bessie added, with a slight sneer.

"Why, what about?" he asked, much concerned, and not seeing Bessie's drift.

“Well, I should think you would easily be able to understand.”

The wicked look in Bessie's eyes recalled their former conversation to his mind. He experienced a painful revulsion of feeling for a moment, and then, ashamed of his weakness, he said quickly,—

“Let us get her out of this close passage.”

Stooping, he gathered up her childish, helpless form in his arms. Bessie noted the tenderness with which he bent over the girl, and the care he took in placing her head so as to support it against his shoulder, as he carried her: one hand and arm hung down listlessly, and De Montfort's blood coursed fast as his eyes noted the pretty helpless feet; one little house slipper had fallen off, and he saw, and remembered long afterwards, the neat darn revealed in the dainty stocking. Pretty underwear was one of “Kitty's useless extravagances,” according to Bessie's ideas. Tenderly De Montfort carried Kitty down the corridor to an old sofa which stood against the wall. Having laid her down, he tapped gently at Malcolm's door which was beside it, and called him to come quickly and help him carry the sofa and place it before the open door, leading out on to the verandah,

Malcolm's face changed colour when, quickly opening his door, he saw and grasped the situation.

"Poor little Kitty! what has happened?" Bessie heard him say, hardly above his breath. Then together the two friends proceeded to place the sofa in the pure air. Bessie stood by, doing and saying nothing.

"Get some water." Wyndham turned to Malcolm as he himself knelt down beside the couch and began to chafe Kitty's hands. Bessie did not move, and Malcolm turned quickly to the pail which stood always, fresh filled from the spring, upon a wooden bench at the other end of the corridor near the head of the staircase. "Haven't you got any salts, Miss Barmore?"

"I'll go and get Nan to come."

Bessie felt as if her jealousy would stifle her; she determined to stop the scene at any cost. Seeing Bessie's back turned, and Malcolm gone towards the distant water pail, Wyndham permitted himself to take one long, yearning look at the girl's face. He longed to have the right to kiss into warmth and life her slightly parted lips. He noted the delicate tracery of the blue veins upon her

closed eyelids, whose long fringes lay so terribly still upon her cheeks; a horrible fear that she was dead suddenly possessed him. Bending nearer to her, he said in a whisper, "Dear, darling, *my* darling, wake up." His breath fell hot upon her as he in his anxiety bent closer to her; his heart gave a great bound of relief, when, as if his own burning breath had had power to re-invigorate her, he perceived a slight tinge of colour returning to her pale face.

"Thank God! Thank God!" The fervent prayer reached Kitty's ear, and startled her back into fuller consciousness; she opened her eyes. For a moment all was a blank to her, then, memory returning, shame overpowered her, and she tried to hide herself from his ardent eyes by quickly burying her face. She did not know that his arm had been supporting her, and she had turned and laid her face against his breast.

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An hour later Nan closed the door of Kitty's room, leaving her, as she supposed, asleep. The girl lay perfectly still until the last sound of Nan's footsteps died away in silence; then, starting up in her bed, she sat

with her hands tightly clasped and her eyes fixed upon the open window. Her face wore an expression new to it, in which fear, wonder, anger and disgust contended for the mastery. A bright flush had painted itself upon her cheeks, making her eyes appear even bluer than their wont under their long fringes. The day being so warm she had thrown aside her pink cotton frock, and now sat, her hair tossed back and her creamy throat and shoulders revealed in all their youthful beauty. Half dazed by the events of the last hour or two, she tried now to collect her thoughts.

This was the first time her cousin Bessie had openly quarrelled with her, and she felt stunned at the other's unkindness. A child in mind and sentiments, such thoughts as Bessie's accusations had suggested had never before occurred to her. Bessie had that day found her still a child and left her a woman. The exquisite innocence and unconsciousness of childhood had given place to a confusion of ideas; for the first time Kitty realised her supreme need, until now unrecognised, that of her mother's love. She felt like a lonely castaway upon a strange shore. Where

should she turn for guidance? She thought naturally of Nan as her only female relative, she who had been her nurse since infancy; but good Nan, with her simple ideas, would, she knew, be as little able as herself to solve the problems which now confused her mind. She shrank from telling her trouble to her father; a certain delicate shame restrained her, she could not have explained to herself why she felt this reluctance.

Until now, she had never had a thought which her father had not shared; to him had she run with all her childish woes, and his were the first commendations she had sought upon the occasions of her innocent triumphs and successes. In sickness she had lain in his arms, secure in his protection and love, hearing the strong beat of his heart beneath her ear. Those powerful heart-beats had filled her childish imagination with awe, and increased her reverence for him who was her devoted slave and constant companion. He had endeavoured to fill the place of both parents to his motherless child; and, until now, had succeeded in winning her entire confidence, as well as her love. Generally their home had been without other inhabitants

than Nan, Kitty, himself and his servants; this summer, however, he had invited different relatives to visit him, thinking thus to further amuse his lonely child. Could he have known it, Kitty found this incursion far from being a diversion, and she continually longed for the sigh of the autumn winds in the hearts of the great trees, which stood around the house and filled the yard, knowing that this would be the signal for flight of these summer visitors,

She was especially puzzled by Bessie, who had surprised and disconcerted her with her ambitious aspirations with regard to marriage. At first, hearing them, Kitty had gone on her way, laughing and believing them a joke; now, however, she found that instead Bessie was in bitter earnest. This train of thought brought De Montfort to her mind, and the events of the afternoon. Suddenly her face was suffused with blushes, which coloured even her throat, and stole down the whiteness of her breast. Burying her face in her hands, she cried, "I can never see him again. I cannot! I cannot! Oh, Bessie, how hateful you have been."

"Are you awake, darling? I thought you were fast asleep."

Good Nan, hearing her voice from outside the door, where she had stolen back to keep watch, stood upon the threshold. Kitty startled, lifted her head quickly.

“What is it, Aunt Nan?”

“Nothing, dear. I heard you stir, and came in to see if you would like a cup of coffee?”

“Oh, yes, yes.” Her only thought was to get rid of Nan and be alone.

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About half-past seven that evening all the house was astir in expectation of the straw-ride. The music of youthful laughter resounded everywhere—in the house, on the porch, and under the old trees in the yard. Great preparations were being made, and in the distance could be heard the rumble of the great wain wending its way heavily towards the house, at the heels of its queerly assorted train of beasts; the crack of the driver's long whip could be heard at intervals urging up the animals to their unwonted task.

“Here comes the team,” exclaimed Uncle John, cheerily. “Is everybody ready?”

“And here comes the moon, Tom,” added the master of the house, laughing and point-

ing towards the great red disc which smiled at them through the interlacing branches of the oaks at his left. "I guess you couldn't do very well without her." Then turning and looking from group to group, he said, "Where's Kitty? I don't see her anywhere."

De Montfort, who had long ago missed her, listened eagerly for the response, standing smoking with his back against one of the pillars of the porch.

"Oh, she must be somewhere around," Tom answered carelessly. Then, turning to the window nearest him, he shouted, "Kitty! Kitty!"

Kitty, who was in the kitchen, heard, and her face flushed deeply.

"What must I do, what must I do?" she thought. "I can never go. I don't know what he must think of me."

Bessie's words had so disturbed her that she had almost determined not to accompany the others that evening; and yet she felt she had not strength to face all the inquiries which would be made.

"Kitty! say, Kitty! Where are you?"

"Here she is!"

Two of her school friends burst into the kitchen.

“Why don’t you come, Kitty? We’re waiting for you, an’ the moon’s perfectly lovely; come along.”

They caught her arms, a boy on one side and his sister on the other, and together dragged her from her hiding-place, laughing and unconscious of the fact that Kitty had had any idea of remaining behind. Overborne by their impetuosity, Kitty thought the best thing was to go quietly, but she made up her mind she would stay with these two, and not speak to either of the Englishmen all the evening.

“Good-bye, dear dad,” she said, seeking to stop her escorts beside her father’s chair in the porch. They released her, and, throwing herself upon her knees, she wound her arms about him, and kissed him so passionately as to surprise him.

“Why, Kitty, what’s the matter? One would think you were going on a journey instead of a straw-ride.”

She had buried her face in his breast, and longed to remain there undisturbed.

“Something’s the matter with her,” said

the young girl at her side, innocently ; “ we found her all alone in the kitchen and made her come.”

This alarmed Mr Fauntleroy ; he felt the clinging of her arms about him, and his intense love for her made him discern that all was not right with his pet. Taking her head in both his hands he turned up her face towards his own.

“ Tears, Kitty, tears, dear ; why, what has happened ? ”

He was really alarmed. Tears and Kitty were an unreconcilable quantity in her father’s mind. Except when her tender little heart had been touched by the sufferings of some of her many, old and sick, white and nigger *protégés*, or, perhaps, by the death of a pet, he had never seen her cry. She had always been as a radiant sunbeam near him, diffusing her happiness as light about his invalid couch, and warming his heart with her bright smiles and happy laughter.

Wyndham, sheltered in a doorway near, also saw the tears, as the light from the parlour lamp fell upon her upturned face ; he bit his lip, restraining with difficulty his longing to try to comfort her. Lying there in

her father's arms, he realised that she was in a safe haven. "Confound it all," he thought, "what can have happened to disturb her." With his disengaged hand he turned the long end of one side of his moustache between his teeth and bit it fiercely.

At this moment the driver of the team cracked his whip; Bessie called out "Aren't you coming Mr De Montfort?" and Malcolm sitting beside her, joined in "We are all ready, old fellow." Then came the cry from many voices, "Where's Kitty?"

"Let me take care of Miss Fauntleroy, sir." Wyndham advanced from his corner.

"Oh, dad, I'd rather not go," Kitty whispered hurriedly, as she pulled his handkerchief from his pocket, and quickly dried her eyes with it.

"Nonsense, Kitty, run along," and turning to Wyndham, who had become a great favourite of his, he added, "You look after her, De Montfort; she seems a little out of sorts, and the ride will do her good."

"That I shall," responded the other, earnestly, his face flushing with the emotion he felt.

"Dear dad, I do wish you wouldn't," again poor little Kitty whispered, despairing at the turn events were taking.

“Come Kitty! come Kitty! we can’t wait all night,” came in the voice of Uncle Tom, chorused by a dozen others, “Kitty, Kitty!”

Obeying an overpowering impulse to comfort and protect her, Wyndham advanced to where she now stood beside her father and took her hand as if she had been a child. She did not resist the clasp of his strong fingers. Had she been less a child she might have felt that they trembled as they closed over hers.

“Come along—” He checked himself, then added more formally, “Miss Kitty.”

Her father, relieved to see that she was no longer crying, hastened to assist him with, “Now, get along, Kitty,” called out in a tone of pretended jollity, and Kitty, overcome by the potency of Wyndham’s firm grasp, felt her determination failing her. She knew that to resist further would necessitate explanations which she felt unable to formulate even to herself. With her hand still held, she turned in a confusion of strange emotion, and bending over him, silently kissed her father; then, as if in a sort of trance, she looked up into Wyndham’s face, dumbly inquiring whither he meant to lead her.

“I assure you, I shall take every care of her. *Au revoir*, Mr Fauntleroy.”

Wyndham, bowing to his host, laid Kitty's little passive hand upon his own arm, and turning, conducted her down the steps of the porch and out into the yard beyond, to where the waggon stood. She walked unresistingly by his side, mesmerised by his powerful will. It seemed to her a dream, and perfectly natural that he should thus firmly be compelling her to accompany him against her will. All had become unreal to her; she heard the noise and clamour of the others calling her and urging speed without applying it to herself. She even saw good old Nan's face, in its accustomed broad flapping hat, bending over the side of the high waggon, smiling down upon her without making any response, and when De Montfort, bending down, said gently,—

“Do not try to climb up, Kitty. I'll lift you in as it is so high.”

She felt a quiet sense of comfort in resigning herself to him, to be lifted like a child, she who always refused assistance, when in camping-out parties there was difficult climbing to be done, and whose agile body could swing itself unaided from point to point, scorning assistance.

Wyndham breathed hard as he felt the weight of her slender body against his breast, unconsciously she seemed to cling to him, his head swam, and a longing that this moment could last for ever flashed by him as he raised and lifted her, and placed her upon the straw at Nan's side. His influence was so strong upon her, that as his arms slowly unwound themselves from about her, she experienced a sense of loss, and was only recalled to herself by a rather coarse laugh from Bessie opposite, who called out,—

“Whatever in the world is the matter with you, Kitty? You seem determined to give Mr de Montfort trouble to-day.”

Kitty started, and the glamour of Wyndham's control over her will suddenly left her, overcome with shame and terror. “Had she not determined to avoid him? not even to speak to him again and, yet . . . and yet . . . ” She crouched down against Nan's side, endeavouring to lose herself behind her, and turning as far as she could from De Montfort who had succeeded in ousting a country youth, and had settled himself in the latter's place at her other side. He had heard Bessie's unkind speech, and flashed a look of disapproval

upon the beauty, who was endeavouring to distract to herself the whole of Malcolm Fairleigh's attention. The latter, however, was regarding Kitty anxiously.

"I hope you are no longer feeling ill, Miss Kitty?" he asked kindly.

"Oh, no, I am quite well," Kitty said hastily.

"Then why do you need gentlemen to lift you into the waggon? You used not to be so fragile."

Bessie's voice drawled out slowly with unpleasant accentuation. She hated Malcolm as she noted the tone of interest in his voice. He and Kitty had become very friendly lately; his youth had led her to regard him somewhat in the light of the other boys with whom she had attended school all her life.

At the moment when Bessie finished speaking, the driver again began to urge his animals to make the start down the curving carriage drive. The whip cracked, the waggon gave a great jolt, for the drive had scarcely been mended since slave times, and amidst the merry screams and laughter of the young people, poor little Kitty sunk into a pained silence behind Nan's ample back. De Mont-

fort, seated beside her, was keenly alive to her distress, and, manlike, he longed to comfort her, without knowing how to do so. The waggon jolted through the old gateway and out into the high road, which, being more open, gave a lovely view over the country towards Pisgah, lying bathed in the light of the full moon.

The young ones were in the highest spirits, and, with one accord, on coming out into the moonlight, burst into song. To the accompaniment of whip-cracks, the rumbling of the heavy wain, the jingling of harness, and the steady tramping of the animals, the sweet old measures of "Down by the Swanee River," winged themselves through the still air of the balmy summer's night. Bessie, who had a fine voice, though uncultivated, was the leader; Malcolm's tenor rose in concert, and the rest sang as only the young and the birds can sing, their whole glad hearts in their fresh voices. Good Nan joined in with the rest, and only Kitty and De Montfort were silent. They went along thus for about a quarter-of-a-mile, the road skirting by the rushing waters of the French Broad, which could be seen gliding swift and black in the moonlight, churning itself into

circles of white foam about the rocks which everywhere are strewn within its bed.

Bessie enjoyed the discomfoting effect of her words on Kitty, and, though singing, watched her narrowly. She noted, also, De Montfort's preoccupation, and with jealous mortification attributed it to its true cause. The moonlight was so brilliant that Bessie was well able to read the expression of all the faces surrounding her. De Montfort looking up suddenly, found her eyes rivetted upon his face, with, to him, an incomprehensible expression. She was thinking "Why should he throw himself away upon that child, when I . . . when I" His eyes raised and met hers; his expression was cold and distrustful; it brought the colour to her face, and a further pang to her heart. Feeling the situation unbearable, she called out quickly,—

"Kitty, why don't you sing? Kitty!"

"Miss Fauntleroy has a headache, I believe," interposed Wyndham, with a readiness which surprised himself.

Kitty, though having determined to avoid him, at this could not refrain from lifting her eyes to his with a shy smile; he was rewarded.

Malcolm, looking on, saw it all, and sighed; he loved Kitty with all the admiration of an English boy who meets for the first time his ideal. He was accustomed to the pruderies and ridiculous affectations of most English girls, who are nearly always either shyly self-conscious to the verge of awkwardness and stupidity, or boldly imitative of their younger brothers home from Eton, adopting mannish gestures, loud tones, pretended liking for tobacco and ostler's talk of horses, races and the like, till they make themselves appear almost unsexed in the eyes of all thinking men. Malcolm saw in Kitty a lovely rose, perfect in its beauty and entire naturalness. He found her always thinking for others, and forgetful of herself — unselfish, devoted to truth, beautiful, with no thought of what effect she produced, accepting the homage she received with perfect naturalness and without affectation, shrined from insult by the delicate modesty which environed her, as with an exquisite perfume; in truth, the wild rose of Nature, and unspoiled by an artificial cultivation.

“Let me arrange this shawl behind you.” Without waiting for her response, De Montfort

made a comfortable pad of one of his travelling wraps, and proceeded to place it between the rough waggon side and Kitty's shoulder; she smiled her thanks at him, quietly, and said to Nan, taking hold of her arm,—

“Do lean up here, too, Aunt Nan.” As she spoke she looked across at Malcolm, who, glad to see her more cheerful, leaned towards her, and said,—

“Isn't this jolly! I shall get my governor to give a straw-ride when I get back to England.”

At this everyone burst into a merry laugh. An English straw-ride! the incongruity of the idea was startling. Under cover of the laughter Wyndham drew nearer to Kitty, and said, in a meaning tone,—

“I hope you will one day see England, Kitty.” His voice was very low, and seemed to caress the name as he spoke it.

Bessie, straining her ears to hear him, failed to catch the words, but she saw his gesture, and the expression of his eyes. She thought, “He loves her—or is he only fooling with her?”

“Would you like to go there?” Wyndham went on,

“Yes, if papa could take me,” she answered, innocently raising her eyes to his. A pang of disappointment seized him. “Would she never understand?”

“But you might go with someone else.”

She looked up startled.

“I would never leave dad. I could not.”

“Yet you are going to New York in November,” sneered Bessie, who had overheard her last words.

Kitty flashed angrily,—

“I won’t go to New York,” she cried warmly. “Poor dad makes a mistake when he wants me to.”

At this Bessie laughed sceptically, and the other young ones, to whom far-off New York seemed a Paradise, chorused their disapprobation, and voiced their longing to have her promised opportunity of enjoyment. Nan only was silent, fumbling dismally in her pocket for her handkerchief; and Malcolm, knowing the subject a sore one with Kitty, sought kindly to turn the conversation by calling attention to a curious cloud which seemed suspended over a gorge in the mountains not very far distant.

‘My God!’ exclaimed Uncle Tom, rubbing

hard at his eyes—he had been half asleep amongst the straw, and was aroused by the others calling his attention to the cloud which, funnel-shaped, hung black in the otherwise clear sky ahead of them—‘My God! that’s a cloud-burst. Where are we, Jim?’ he cried to the driver who had arrested his team, and with startled eyes also gazed at the awful object ahead.

“We’re in about the worst place we could be caught in, if the water comes down three miles up Pike’s bottom; the team can’t get up them banks nohow, so we must turn and run.”

The men had jumped out of the wain by this time, and were assisting in getting the long team to turn round on the narrow track. They were in a place which had once been the bed of a creek, long since disappeared, and were well aware of the danger which threatened them.

The heavy wain turned with its precious freight of now trembling girls; the men once more got in, pale faces, with teeth firm set. Silently they kept their eyes fixed upon the great cloud in their rear, which seemed to their excited fancies already nearer. The only

sounds were, the repeated whip-cracks, and the heartrending cries of the driver to his beasts, urging them to their top speed as they galloped furiously down the narrow pass. Bessie was sobbing loudly against Wyndham's shoulder, all her bravado disappeared. Kitty quietly tried to comfort good Nan, while the tears stole silently down her cheeks as she thought of her father sitting happily awaiting their return, unknowing of the awful danger which threatened them. Of the others, sudden peril had soothed any petty jealousies and awakened many dormant sympathies; strong and slender hands met and grasped in an anguish of mutual terror. The wain rocked and jolted perilously near to overturning as the team tore onwards; the poor brutes ahead seemed to scent danger, snorting and breathing hard, and one, a roarer, added to the horror of the time with the unearthly sounds he made as he tugged furiously at the collar, flogged and sworn at by his terror-maddened driver.

On they went, jolting over stones, crashing over fallen branches, the trees flying by like so many gigantic milestones in an infernal dream, while above, in strangest contrast, rode the

moon, star-surrounded, calm in the calm heavens. Suddenly there was a halt and a crash; one of the foremost beasts had stumbled and fallen. The poor brute had been since early morning at the plough, and weary from a hard day of steady work, could not sustain the break-neck pace to which he had been put. With difficulty the driver gathered in the rest of team, and managed, without further accident, to stop the waggon.

“There is nothing for it but to take out the beasts and make for the side of the hill,” cried Uncle Tom, hurriedly descending. “Get out girls, our only hope is to make the higher ground before the water comes down!”

In a minute the waggon was empty, the beasts free and, without waiting for the rest of the men who were assisting to disentangle the fallen animal, the girls were clambering up the side of the ravine, assisted by the two Englishmen and Uncle Tom. Malcolm was helping Bessie and another girl. De Montfort had given his arm to Nan, and with Kitty's hand hard clasped in his, the trio made their way over the rocks and loose stones, and through the brush, followed with greater difficulty still by the men leading the trembling beasts,

They had almost gained the upper ground, when Uncle Tom, who was aiding an elderly lady and her daughter to make the steep incline, gave a shout to those below to leave the fallen brute and hasten upwards. He, from his place of vantage, could see several miles up the valley, and to his horror, instead of the empty bed of the long since dried-up stream, he perceived the whole ravine a broad silver sea, looking peaceful enough under the moon's calm rays, but, in reality, a rushing black flood, covered with foam and debris, carrying death and destruction to all and everything it found in its path.

Seeing the extent of the water, Uncle Tom shouted to all to get up higher, and everyone strained their utmost up the steep incline. Suddenly, with a cry of pain, Kitty slipped; the force of the jerk loosened her hand from Wyndham's, and, unable to help herself, she went rolling downwards, over the slippery sun-dried grass and loose stones, towards the edge of the actual ravine, which they were now above, and which in a few minutes more would become a flood of seething waters. Already could be heard the dull, steady roar of the oncoming torrent. Shaking himself

free of Nan's clinging arm, De Montfort threw himself towards Kitty, shouting to her to clutch at the grass and stones. He could hear the sound of the water every moment augmenting, and saw Kitty's white dress drawing each second nearer the brink of the ravine. The summer sun had rendered the grass so slippery that he had hard work not to fall himself, and either go rolling down into the ravine alone, or perhaps, worse still, carrying Kitty with him. The girl, whose ankle was dislocated, kept her head, and, with much difficulty, managed to stop her descent by entangling the one foot left her in a low growth, which protruded itself an inch or two above the surface of the earth amidst the grass, and, with her hands clinging to the stones above her, she waited for De Montfort's coming.

With the horror of the sound of the on-coming water in her ears, and unable to move, the seconds seemed interminable ages to her. She watched him making the difficult descent, now slipping, and again just regaining his balance in time to prevent his precipitating himself upon her and carrying both to destruction. It seemed to her as if

he would never reach her. Feeling the scrub at her feet beginning to give way slowly, she closed her eyes in a last agony of expectation, instinctively shrinking from seeing the edge of the abyss as it approached; her bleeding fingers clung with all their frail strength to the cruel stones which loosened as, her foot giving way, her whole weight depended upon them. She felt as if she must relinquish voluntarily this, her last hold; a deadly giddiness oppressed her, her tense muscles relaxed, the poor little hands gave up their hold, and her body commenced slowly moving downwards.

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“My wife, my darling, my little Kitty.” Staggering upwards, almost blinded with the tears which resulted from overtaxed nervous tension, De Montfort sobbed as he bent his lips upon Kitty’s golden hair, and gathered her closer in his arms. She had become unconscious, and was mercifully spared the horrors of the ascent. He could hear the shouts of the others, far above him, calling to him to hasten. This, with Kitty’s dead weight in his arms, he found very difficult because of the slipperiness of the dried grass

Stumbling and struggling upwards, he passed the poor beasts which, unable to go higher, had been left to their fate. He saw Uncle Tom and Malcolm coming down to meet and give him aid ; staggering on, it seemed to him as if he walked in a dream, as if he had gone through it all before. Suddenly a terrible shout made him turn his head ; looking towards the source of the expected danger, he saw, at the angle of the hill, where the ravine came nearest into sight, a high wall of water—to him it seemed a mountain — bearing steadily towards him. Bravely he struggled on, the roar of the awful waters in his ears, and poor little Kitty unconscious in his arms. He could no longer hear the shouts of those above him, and deafened and maddened stumbled on by instinct.

He never knew how he accomplished the last part of the ascent. He remembered nothing, till he found himself being relieved of the burden he bore by Tom and Malcolm, and surrounded by friendly faces. Then he seemed to emerge from a dream, and with a hoarse “Thank God !” fell senseless.

CHAPTER VI

PASSION

“Love is a fire ;
But ah, how short-lived is the flame Desire !
And blackened all things else, itself hath perished.
And now alone in gathering night we stand,
Ashes and ruin stretch on either hand.”

ANNE REEVE ALDRICH.

“TAKE my arm, Kitty, you will feel stronger when you have walked a few steps.”

The girl looked up with innocent confidence into the strong face bending above her, and laid her hand, very white and small, upon his proffered arm.

“It seems so strange for me to be an invalid. It is three weeks now, and I cannot get accustomed to it.”

“Why, Kitty, you are well now ; you must not call yourself helpless any more. In a few days I shall lift you on to ‘Cleve’s’ back and take you for a ride. Would you like that?”

A bright smile was the response as she again looked up into his face.

“How good you are,” was all she said, and he fancied she clung a little closer to his arm, as if with increased confidence in his protection.

They were upon the porch, and Wyndham, after carrying her down from her room, assisted by Nan and old Pete, had been reading to her, and trying to interest her with stories of his home in England, and of his travels in many lands. On his sofa, near by, her father lay dosing, his paper fallen from his hand, and his old hound keeping guard beside him. The horror of the flood and the shock of Kitty's injury had had a bad effect upon Mr Fauntleroy, and he had been ailing more than usual since the disaster.

As Kitty stood leaning upon De Montfort's arm, her eyes fell upon her father's delicate face. The smile died from her own as she noted the pathetic lines of suffering about his mouth, suffering borne without complaint, and concealed beneath an assumption of cheerfulness when often most poignant. The extreme delicacy of his hand, hanging listless over the side of the couch, perhaps told more than did

his face; that hand once so strong to curb a rebellious horse, or to handle the heaviest rifle.

"I cannot bear to see him looking so ill," she said sadly, and Wyndham saw her blue eyes fill with tears. Fearing in her weak state to see her cry, he said quickly,—

"Now, Kitty, you must not give way like this. Come, I have told Pete to arrange the hammock down under the trees. Lean on me. The grass is soft, and I think we can easily walk as far as that," he went on cheerily.

In response, Kitty raised her eyes to his with the tears still glistening upon her long lashes. He longed to fold her in his arms and kiss the tears away, but restrained himself, thinking that the time was not yet ripe for telling her of his love, and knowing that she, beyond her child-like confidence and trust in him, was conscious of no warmer feeling for him.

Slowly they made their way together across the ill-kept drive and to the grass beyond. They had nearly accomplished half the distance when Wyndham felt Kitty's weight becoming greater upon his arm; anxiously he sought to see her face, her head was drooping slightly, and the thick waving gold

of her hair hung forward like a curtain, partially screening her face from his view.

“Are you faint, dear?” he asked gently, standing still beneath the great whispering trees. She did not answer; and, alarmed, he passed his arm around her to support her, just in time to prevent her falling upon the grass; she had fainted.

“Poor child, she is weaker than I supposed,” he thought, lifting her and carrying her towards the hammock. At this moment he saw walking towards him Malcolm and Bessie. “Malcolm, come and give me a hand,” he called, “this poor child has fainted. You had better run to the house and bring me my flask. Do not alarm her father,” he added thoughtfully, “he is on the porch, and asleep.”

As Malcolm sped towards the house to do his behest, Bessie came slowly towards him, with a disagreeable smile upon her lips.

“How very interesting,” she said, in a tone which exasperated Wyndham.

He had scarcely seen her since the disaster, as she had been compelled to return home and help her mother and grandmother, and thus was ignorant of the part of Nan’s assistant in nursing, which he had been fulfilling towards Kitty.

"Pardon me, Miss Barmore," he said coldly, "but I cannot see anything to sneer at in your little cousin's fainting."

He turned and sought to arrange Kitty's head more comfortably upon the cushions. Bessie standing behind him trembled with conflicting passions as she jealously watched his solicitude for Kitty.

"I was not sneering, Mr de Montfort," she said, "I was only surprised to see you so disturbed and anxious about the promised wife of another man. I wonder what *he* would have to say," she added, with a little insolent laugh. "I guess Kitty has taken good care not to speak of him to you, though. He is very poor, you know, and I daresay she would not care to mention him to *you*."

She laid an unpleasant stress upon the last word of her speech. Wyndham heard it all with bitter rage gnawing at his heart. He bent forward over Kitty, arranging a shawl about her; Bessie could not see his face, but she saw that his hands moved blindly, as if acting automatically, and she knew that her shot had struck home.

"If I could only make him suffer a little of what I suffer," she thought, closing her un-

gloved hands till the nails bit into the flesh. "Why did I ever see him? I was happy before . . . I did not know . . . I thought I loved Will Bell . . . I might have loved Malcolm, and made him love me, if I had never seen *him*."

She gazed hungrily at Wyndham's profile, which now turned towards her, as he anxiously watched for Malcolm's return from the house. Wyndham possessed that rare beauty in a man, a fine square jaw, and magnificent throat; he carried his head well, and had the air of one born to dominate. Bessie knew every turn of his head; every little trick and expression of his face. She watched him now from the garden seat, into which she had sunk inert, with the hopeless misery of one of the condemned.

Meanwhile, to Wyndham's great contentment, Kitty opened her eyes and, smiling, thanked him for the care he had shown her. Malcolm returned with Nan and some wine and cake for Kitty's refreshment. Kitty sat up in her hammock, laughing, telling Nan, who was much concerned about her, that she was quite well. Malcolm, who was in high spirits, laughed with both, and Bessie sat on in moodily discontented silence. Wyndham,

leaving Kitty in Nan's care as soon as she appeared cheerful and comfortable, excused himself and walked off up the mountain which lay at the back of the house in the direction of the spring. He felt the necessity of being alone. He wanted to think.

Since the night of the disaster Wyndham had almost lost sight of the jealousy which Bessie's hints and innuendoes had given birth to. His constant attendance upon little Kitty, her innocent, child-like character and behaviour, had soothed him into forgetfulness of his former fears. Now Bessie's bold assertions reawakened all his previous doubts, and recalled him from the lulled security into which he had fallen.

He walked rapidly onwards, noticing nothing by the wayside, and completely absorbed in his painful thoughts. Kitty had seemed to him so child-like, so devoted to her father alone, that he found it difficult to believe that another interest overshadowed her life, of such strength as to even render her rebellious against the wishes of her father, causing her to propose later to make an unsuitable marriage in direct disobedience to his will.

She had seemed to him so fresh and innocent, and without experience of any kind. For him

this had been one of her principal charms, and it hurt him to have his belief in her lessened even in the smallest degree. The sun went down, and still he climbed upwards, not noting where he was, and with Bessie's brutally plain assertions repeating themselves in his ears.

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 "Going to leave us, De Montfort? Why, that is a sudden determination, is it not?"

Kitty's father looked up into his visitor's face with a simple, affectionate regard. He had grown attached to the younger man, and there was a sincere ring of regret in his voice as he responded to Wyndham's announcement that the latter intended to leave for the West on the morrow to prosecute his long-deferred visit to some English friends in Lower California.

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 "By Jove, old fellow, what is taking you off so suddenly? Of course I am ready to start, if you wish it; but it seems rather strange to bolt off in this way, doesn't it? Has anything happened?" Malcolm's thoughts flew to Kitty.

"Nothing has happened," replied his friend, rather morosely; "but it appears to me we have

prolonged our stay to an unconscionable length, seeing that I, at least, arrived here without any invitation."

Malcolm regarded his friend's broad back with a puzzled expression; his fair brows knitted as he watched the other stalking up and down the long room with his hands thrust deep in his pockets. De Montfort's head was bent, chin down upon his breast, and he had not cared to raise his eyes and meet those of Malcolm as he made his announcement of intended departure.

The last hues of a glorious sunset were dying in the sky without, and they were in Malcolm's room, whither the latter had come to make some change in his toilet before going down to supper.

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The announcement of their guests' intended departure on the morrow had been communicated to the other members of the family by Mr Fauntleroy, as they assembled round the long and brightly-lighted supper-table.

Kitty heard the announcement with genuine regret, but was unconscious to herself of any deeper feeling. Aunt Nan and Uncle Tom were loud in their complaints at losing their friends, for the latter had, both by their

pleasant manners and manly bearing and conduct, endeared themselves to everyone in this quiet country house among the Alleghanies.

Bessie alone of all the large assemblage was silent. An unnatural light burnt in her large grey eyes, they seemed black under the influence of her excitement, and a brilliant spot of colour had painted itself upon either cheek, giving her the one touch her beauty lacked, and making her appear almost startlingly handsome. Malcolm could not remove his eyes from her face. She saw his admiration for her expressed in his eyes, and smiled triumphantly. She was not thinking of him, but of De Montfort, who at this moment entered the room and came quietly to his place at the table beside Kitty. After some time, when the others had ceased in their expressions of regret at De Montfort's leaving, and their many unavailing attempts at persuading him to change his mind and remain; Kitty said softly in his ear,—

“I am so sorry you are going. Why must you, yet?”

De Montfort turned quickly at these words, and noted her tranquil regard with a fierce pang of disappointment. She met the burning

light in his eyes without seeming to see or understand it.

“God!” he thought, “is she a child still, or the veriest hypocrite that breathes?”

Frowning savagely, he turned, and appeared to devote himself to his plate. Bessie, at this moment, forgot to respond to some remark of Malcolm's, she was so keenly interested in the scene before her.

“Many a man has been caught in the rebound,” she said to herself, and waited; noting how Kitty again tormented De Montfort, by saying gently,—

“What has caused you to make up your mind so suddenly? You know you were talking this afternoon of taking me for a ride.”

He turned to reply, and saw merely a look of simple disappointment upon her face at the thought of missing the many little services he had rendered her lately.

“I cannot stand this,” he thought, “better to make the plunge and go to-morrow.”

Turning to her he made some excuse about business calling him, and then, as an after-thought, added,—

“But we shall meet in New York in November; you—”

“Oh, I hope not!” exclaimed the girl, looking anxiously towards her father, “I do hope not!”

Bessie saw the quick contraction of his brows. Suddenly, becoming aware that she was watching him, he turned his head towards Aunt Nan, and asked her some indifferent question.

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The evening was drawing to a close. The nightly dance in the parlour was ended, and a noisy game of forfeits was in progress before the young people should retire for the night. Here and there, lying curled up in corners, or stretched along the benches by the wall, were seen the youngest members of the family, who should long since have been in bed and asleep, but, Southern fashion, were permitted to remain up until the hour when their elders, too, retired.

Kitty, of course, had not joined in the dancing, and now remained sitting at her father's side watching the somewhat uproarious fun of the forfeit players. De Montfort, making an excuse about his packing, had escaped to have a smoke, and sauntered off down the yard to think, under the shadow of the great trees where the hammock was swung. This was a

favourite resort of his, and Bessie, watching him, knew as she heard his footstep leave the verandah, that he had gone there. Presently she, too, quietly left the room by an open window, and started to cross the yard. Malcolm, looking after her, saw her white dress gleaming in the moonlight as it moved amongst the trees. He had been paying her great attention to-night, for, owing to the suppressed excitement she was labouring under, she had never appeared more beautiful. He was enchanted by her gaiety, which he was too inexperienced to know was false, and the result of the over-tension of her nerves. Seeing her disappear through the trees, and not knowing that De Montfort, also, had gone that way, Malcolm determined that as soon as he could escape the forfeits he would follow her.

De Montfort was pacing to and fro beneath the trees. Bessie could see his tall figure in the distance, now appearing where the moonlight pierced the branches of the great black pines, and then disappearing altogether in the deep shadows beyond. A desperate impulse had caused her to follow him; she could not have told why she did it, or what she hoped for as a result of the precipitate step she was

taking. Blinded by her passion for him, and her anguish at the knowledge of his departure on the morrow, she had become desperate, forgetting maidenly modesty, shame, everything which should have restrained her in her impetuous course, she longed only to gain his side, to hear his voice, even were it only raised to curse and not to bless her.

De Montfort was too deeply absorbed in his own thoughts to notice Bessie's approach; just as she neared him he seated himself wearily upon a rustic seat within the shadow, and, taking out a cigar, proceeded to light it. Bessie halted close beside him. Now that she was with him, she began to realise the difficulty of the position. For a moment she vacillated. Should she go back again? he had not seen her, and she could do it, still unperceived by him. She turned her face towards the house; as she did so, all the misery returned which she had suffered for these hours past, since she had known that he was to go away upon the morrow, and that she would, in all probability, never again look upon his face. The thought maddened her. She could not do it. She must speak to him . . . tell him. . . . She could not let

him go, thus. . . . She must follow him . . . anything . . . anything. . . . But to lose him for ever, for ever. . . . She shivered; the balmy warmth of the summer's night seemed to have become suddenly cold; her limbs trembled under her; she felt herself reeling, as she looked upon him where he sat, half turned from her, looking towards Kitty's hammock.

All her bravado and false spirits left her, and she realised, as if suddenly become clairvoyant, what the empty future would mean to her, alone, without him. She tried to speak to him, to cry out in her misery at the thought, but her throat was dry, and her voice came in a whisper, she felt as if some frightful nightmare held her. Suddenly some slight sound she made aroused De Montfort; he turned and saw her standing there.

"Miss Barmore!" he exclaimed, rising and facing her, "is anything the matter?" His thoughts immediately flew to Kitty. "Anything wrong at the house?"

Feeling instantly the drift of his thoughts, she rallied herself and said with a little bitter laugh,—

"No, nothing is wrong at the house."

She noted his sigh of relief as he heard her reply to his hurried question, and her jealousy, again aroused, she looked at him with hatred, almost as great as the love she had felt a moment before for him. She remained standing silent, face to face with him.

De Montfort had thrown his cigar away upon seeing her, and stood expectant, looking down into her face where the moonlight fell full upon it, showing its beautiful lines, made tense with mental suffering, and her lips and cheeks pale and drawn. Something in her look disturbed him. Suffering ourselves, we become sympathetic towards the pain of others. Usually unobservant, he now suddenly became aware that she, too, suffered, but was quite at a loss to explain to himself why she should do so.

“Will you not sit down here, Miss Barmore?” he said kindly, motioning with his hand towards the bench from which he had just risen.

A spasm of pain passed over Bessie's face as she heard his voice; all her hatred vanished in an instant, and her passion for him returned with redoubled force. She felt as if she would have fallen; and with her eyes

still looking up into his, now bent with some concern above her, she put out her hands as if feeling blindly for something to prevent her from falling. He saw the gesture, and, thinking her ill, took both her hands in his, and led her unresisting to the seat beside them, gently placing her upon it.

“Let me go to the house and call someone,” he said, beginning to wonder at the strangeness of the position.

“Oh, no, no!”

The piteous pleading of her voice struck him with a new surprise. He looked at her closely as he stood before her. She seemed to crouch upon the bench, and her head was so much bent forward as to conceal her face from him; he had difficulty in knowing her as Bessie Barmore. Bessie, usually erect, almost to defiance; confident almost to boldness, and whose beauty alone, excused in her these defects of a rural education. De Montfort, man-like, stood helpless, not knowing what to do, and remained silently regarding her. Presently she said, very gently,—

“I want to speak to you, please sit down. I cannot talk when you stand there looking at me.” She added her last words with something

of the petulance he was accustomed to in her, causing the situation immediately to appear more natural to him.

“Certainly, Miss Barmore,” he replied, seating himself beside her. “Now tell me what I can do for you?” he added pleasantly.

For answer, to his intense surprise and consternation, Bessie laid her head against his shoulder and began to weep bitterly.

“Miss Barmore!” he exclaimed, unable to rise and release himself. By doing so he must have taken away her support, and he felt her leaning heavily against him. The situation had become ludicrous.

“My dear Miss Barmore, you must be ill; do permit me to assist you to the—”

Her sobs ceased, she raised her head. He was about to rise, when she fiercely clasped both her hands about his arm.

“Wyndham, can you pretend to misunderstand? Will you leave me so, feigning insensibility, when you have broken my heart, and ruined my life?”

De Montfort frowned as he turned his astonished gaze upon her. Excitement had brought back the colour to her face. Her eyes blazed with passionate light as they encountered

his. Unconsciously her hands tightened their clasp upon his arm. Her whole form trembled and vibrated at this contact.

“I would die for you,” she went on hurriedly, her breath coming in fierce gasps, “yes, die! Is it nothing that I tell you this; that I forget all shame and modesty? Oh!” here she gave a bitter cry, “the thought that I must lose you to-morrow—” She broke off, and, still clinging to him, again sobbed violently against his shoulder.

De Montfort would have been less than a man had he remained wholly insensible. Pity for her, and an unconsciously flattered egotism, unsuspected by himself, made him turn towards her and gently slip his arm around her. In an instant her own glad arms were thrown about his neck, her beautiful head was nestling against his throat, her whole soft body seemed caressing him. She was sobbing and laughing in a delirium of joy; the moonlight showed him the lovely lines of her throat and bust. He lost his head. The blood coursed fiercely through his veins. Bending above her, his breath coming short and quick, their lips met. They were alone. The moon had hidden behind a bank of clouds, and left them in

darkness; a delicious summer darkness, warm with the sweet breath of the flowers, and musical with the tender love words of the leaves whispering above their heads.

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The moon had set, leaving little bars of silvery cloud behind.

Three hours had passed.

De Montfort was sitting in judgment upon himself, and cursing his own folly. Bessie, thrilling with joy, lay nestling in his arms, oblivious how time passed. Had he not promised to make her his wife? His ideas of honour had compelled him to do this. For a moment of delirium, he found himself called upon to sacrifice his love, and, with it, the happiness of his whole life. He tried to drive it from him, but could not; Kitty's face haunted him like a reproaching angel. Mentally he reiterated his curses upon his own sin and folly.

A sense of justice made him hold Bessie innocent; she had been overborne by her passionate love for him, whilst he. . . . Well, he, with his whole heart bound up in another woman, had, for a moment of guilty satisfaction, chosen to blast the life of this girl now

clinging to him with, what he supposed was absolute devotion to himself, and to damn his own future. Gloomily he sat, listening to the murmur of the balmy breeze in the trees around, and with little Kitty's hammock hanging like a silent witness of his lost happiness before him.

He listened, too, with something akin to loathing, to the regular breathing of this woman sheltered on his breast. Bessie had drifted from the dreamland of happiness into the dreamland of sleep.

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"Malcolm."

"By Jove, old fellow, what is it?"

Fairleigh roused himself from a sound sleep to find De Montfort standing, pale and haggard, beside his bed. It was dawn, and though the sun had not yet risen, light filled the room, enabling him to perceive the changed aspect of his friend.

"Is anything wrong, De Montfort?"

Malcolm was, by this time, fully awake, and looked anxiously at the other who was uneasily pacing the floor with long strides.

"Our journey," said Wyndham, briefly.

“You look ill; is anything the matter?”

“Nothing whatever,” was the cold response, and De Montfort turned towards the door to leave the room.

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De Montfort was bending over a port-manteau seeking to close it. Unused to being without his valet, he found this difficult, and did not hear the door open, nor notice that the room had other occupants than himself, until, looking up suddenly, he found Bessie standing beside him.

“Good God, what brings you here! Have you no regard for yourself?” he cried, springing to his feet, and not too gently, taking her arm to lead her to the door.

“I must speak to you. I must—” began Bessie, breathlessly.

He was steadily conducting her lagging steps to the door.

“Speak to me! Yes, but not here.”

Bessie hung back.

“You cannot mean to leave me so—the first day of our engagement.” In his excitement he nearly cursed the engagement openly.

“I cannot bear it, here, alone,” she went on, beginning to sob. He closed his eyes for a

moment, in his misery, as if to shut out the sight of her and the remembrance of his folly. His nerves were wrought to their utmost tension; he felt as if he would go mad. "You cannot leave me now, not till we're married." He winced. She had thrown herself into a chair and seemed determined to remain. He knew her obstinacy of character, and began to despair of persuading her to leave the room until it should be too late, and someone have seen her passing out.

In a moment his whole past seemed before him. He thought of his honourable name. He remembered that the women of his house had always been pure. He saw himself the first to stain the shield of the family honour, by bringing to be his helpmeet, and the mother of his children, one for whom he had to blush, and he cursed himself anew. But for his sin and folly it might have been Kitty, his ideal, his love, who should have been his promised wife.

Looking at Bessie, now sitting determinedly where she had placed herself against his will, he hated her. It required all his sense of manhood to prevent him from telling her so, and violently thrusting her from the room.

Taking a turn up and down the long chamber in an effort to regain his calm, he came to her side, and said hoarsely,—

“Bessie, I have explained to you that I must leave to day. His thoughts reverted unwillingly to Kitty, and with a shudder he went on, “*I must leave this place. . . .*”

“But you will make me your wife?”

“Yes, I shall make you my wife.”

He said this with desperate calmness, averting his eyes from her.

“But what a fool they will think me; engaged to be married, and my beau gone away the first day of our engagement,” she said coarsely.

He winced, but told himself that he well deserved his punishment.

“I cannot help that,” he commenced. The sound of a light tap on the door, and of someone entering the room made him turn to see Malcolm standing, his astonished and shocked gaze rivetted upon Bessie.

De Montfort sprang forward to close the door which Malcolm still held open in his wonder, but before he could gain Fairleigh’s side, the latter, with some confused words of excuse, had escaped from the room

and disappeared, closing the door quickly. De Montfort's rage almost overmastered him.

"Now, perhaps you will leave this room now that you have disgraced the noble name I have been fool enough to promise you."

He had gripped her wrist in his endeavour to compel her to obey him; his face was dark and discoloured with rage, and Bessie quailed beneath the anger in his eyes. Slowly she arose, and without another word, going to one of the windows, which stood open, swung herself over its low sill on to the verandah and disappeared. De Montfort, looking after her, saw her pass in sequence the three other windows of the large room; she carried her head thrown back defiantly; her eyes had a hard stare, and the beauty of her features was distorted by the anger they expressed.

It was a poor augury for a happy future.

With a smothered sigh De Montfort turned to leave the room.

"I must save her if I can," he thought bitterly, "or rather the honour of my house."

He passed out through the door with his head bent and an expression of humiliation upon his hitherto haughty face, to the room occupied by Malcolm.

CHAPTER VII

PARTING

“Farewell to the mountains high covered with snow ;
Farewell to the straths and green valleys below ;
Farewell to the forests and wild-hanging woods ;
Farewell to the torrents and loud-pouring floods.”

ROBERT BURNS.

Two weeks had elapsed. Bessie, fearing the ridicule of her companions, had chosen to keep her engagement to herself. She had also another reason—the advent of Will Bell. The latter was coming all the way from Texas to see her, and perhaps claim her promise to him, made three years ago. They had not met for two years, and Will’s coming had been looked forward to as an event in the family. Bessie, knowing his passionate temperament, and how little control he had over himself, thought well to let him come and go again, before making her engagement public. She had been moody and discontented ever since the departure of De

Montfort and his friend. Letters had come thanking Mr Fauntleroy and the family generally for their kindness and hospitality. Bessie raged inwardly that no special one letter had come to her from De Montfort; they had parted before the family with no warmer demonstration than as ordinary friends. De Montfort had made those adieus as curtailed as possible, avoiding being alone with either Bessie or Kitty. The latter had seemed less gay than usual, and the Englishman thought he detected a slight tearfulness in her voice as she bid him adieu. Aunt Nan had openly wept, with much use of a very voluminous pocket - handkerchief. Wyndham, first her patient, had later greatly endeared himself to her. Had he been one of her many nephews she could not have loved him more, and her warm heart overflowed with sorrow at the thought of his departure.

Malcolm had gone away feeling very much distressed regarding the complications which had arisen. Believing that De Montfort was sincerely attached to Kitty, he had, notwithstanding his own devotion to her, honourably endeavoured by every means in his power not to show his love for her, nor in any way allow it

to interfere with his friend's success. Now De Montfort told him of his own engagement to Bessie, taking care to defend her from the appearance of evil which her presence in his room must have suggested to Malcolm's mind that morning, by attributing it to her ignorance of conventional forms and natural desire to be near him as he made his preparations for departure.

De Montfort's engagement to Bessie left Malcolm and Kitty free; and the former bitterly regretted his now closed visit, with its many opportunities, which, had he been less honourable, he might have turned to account in attempting to win the heart of sweet little Kitty.

Dearly as he was attached to his friend he felt a certain bitterness towards him, and had almost brought himself to the point of letting the latter go on his journey alone, and asking Mr Fauntleroy to permit himself to remain for a short time longer here in the mountains. But the stronger will of De Montfort overruling, had brought Malcolm to the point of saying adieu to the family and to departing with himself. Malcolm had, however, the hope of meeting Kitty again, in New York, at no

distant date, and this enabled him to endure the bad luck, as he called it, of the present time.

Thus the friends had gone together, leaving the family in its quiet mountain home, to continue its life in its usual uneventful routine.

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“Dear Aunt Nan, don’t you worry any more over that skirt, I am quite sure it is long enough and will look very well.”

Kitty had come behind Aunt Nan’s low chair, where that good, comfortable creature sat, in the declining rays of the afternoon sun, before the open window. On Nan’s lap, and indeed surrounding her everywhere, in masses of billowy whiteness, were the parts of a white muslin dress in progress of being put together.

Nan was assisted by the two daughters of a Southern colonel who, ruined by the war, were pleased, by means of what they called dressmaking, to earn a few cents to keep the wolf of winter from the door. One of the girls had charge of the sewing-machine, and, to Nan’s great distress, had but just now succeeded in running most of the breadths of delicate material in lock stitch, wrong side

before. Nan's usually beaming face was now puckered uncomfortably in her distress over the mistake which had been made. Kitty, always sympathetic, endeavoured to console her with affectionate caresses, but, to Nan's mind, this affair of preparing Kitty's clothing for her visit to New York was an extremely difficult and weighty matter. She continued to sit fingering the muslin, and apparently so engrossed with her present difficulty as not even to notice Kitty's presence.

The two assistants looked helplessly at their chief, and, all together, they made a picture of a bevy of tired women, weary with the efforts of a long day's sewing, and illumined by no very brilliant ideas as to the proper modes of accomplishing the ends they had in view. Standing behind Nan's chair, with her cheek laid against the latter's smoothly soft hair, Kitty watched them all sadly. She was no more pleased to go to New York than at first, and disliked these preparations which caused good old Nan such trouble and perturbation of mind. She knew that this especial white muslin dress had been the subject of weeks of thought on Nan's part, and was looked upon by her as the flower of all her

efforts, and was intended by the simple-minded creature to be the dress in which Kitty was to appear at the balls, to be given in her honour by her New York grandmother. In the little bonnet-shop of the small, struggling country town, two miles distant, Nan had discovered some long sprays of artificial flowers intended for the garniture of large round hats. These, it had struck her, would look beautiful placed upon each breadth of the full, round skirt, and also on the bodice, and as shoulder-knots; the only thing was that there were hardly enough of the one kind to carry out her plans. This was very distressing to her simple mind, and after spending a sleepless night, she finally resolved the matter to her satisfaction by dispatching old Pete to the milliner, commanding the latter to furnish, besides the wreaths of pink roses with their accompanying apple-green muslin leaves, certain long sprays of white and silver flowers, which had struck her as very lovely, but which, at the time of seeing them, had offered confused suggestions to her mind of both wedding cakes and funerals, and thus had determined her to select the gayer wreaths of pink.

After mature consideration, and the loss of a night's sleep, good old Nan had determined that the pink and white sprays would look well placed alternately upon the skirt of her *chef d'œuvre*, and mingled together gracefully upon its bodice and sleeves. Therefore, this very afternoon, Pete had departed on his mission of procuring them.

Bessie had sneered rudely when Nan proposed the flowers, not because she did not think they would look fitting and well, but because she herself had never possessed a dress so lavishly trimmed, having always had to be content with the Southern girl's pretty, plain white gown, only relieved by a sash defining its short, round waist.

"Aunt Nan, wouldn't you like a cup of tea and some cake?" Kitty leaned further over the back of the chair and kissed her aunt.

At the suggestion of refreshments, the Colonel's tired daughters looked up with little sighs of relief; and Kitty turned and ordered tea of old Pete, who, with a very large cardboard box, now entered the room, followed by Bessie. The latter had noted the arrival of the box, and was jealously

anxious to see its contents. Seating herself upon a table, upon which the cutting-out was in progress, she swung one foot to and fro, whilst she cast a very unsympathetic but curious regard over the workers.

“So you have got it run up, have you?”

She made this remark indifferently to all three. On hearing her words Nan gave a disturbed sigh, but went on using her small scissors in silence, as did the girl who had lately worked the machine.

“Oh, unpicking it again, are you?”

No one answered, and Bessie went on swinging her foot. She had her hair still up in curl-papers; since the departure of the Englishmen she had seldom troubled herself to take much pains over her toilet, and could De Montfort have seen her now, in her soiled and ill-cut faded cotton wrapper, he might have had even less hope for the future than he already possessed.

Old Pete presently appeared with a tray on which were the tea-things and some comfortable home-made cake. To the wearied-out workers these appeared most welcome. The two girls dropped their scissors, and only Nan continued her labour.

"I think I'll go and bring in Dad," said Kitty. "Is there a cup for him, Pete?"

"Golly, yes, Miss Kitty," grunted the old man as he followed her out of the room. In five minutes more the father and daughter returned together.

"Well, girls," said Mr Fauntleroy, cheerily, "I'm come in to see the finery."

"Let us see what Pete has brought," said Bessie, and suiting the action to the word, she began, with no very careful fingers, tumbling the wreaths out of their box.

"Take care! take care!" cried Nan, anxiously. She had at last laid down her scissors, and sat, a piece of cake in one hand and cup of tea in the other, her lap still full of muslin, taking five minutes' rest.

"I'm sure, Aunt Nan, pink ribbons would have been much better," said Bessie enviously, eyeing one of the wreaths which she held in her hand.

Nan paused in drinking her tea to reply. "Yes, but that would not have been full dress."

Nan was looked upon by the girls as somewhat of an oracle in such matters, as she had once passed a fortnight in New Orleans with

an old aunt who lived in the French quarter; therefore her words carried weight.

Kitty, sitting quietly beside her father, listened, and wished that there had been neither wreaths nor ribbons necessary; for she much preferred to these her simple white frock, with a few natural blossoms pinned against her throat.

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The chill October wind was blowing in stormy gusts without, making the great red leaves of the oaks come floating down in showers, and then gathering them up again and swirling them round and round as if in boisterous play. Within the house the fires were already lighted, and were very welcome to the occupants.

Mr Fauntleroy's old sofa had disappeared from the porch with the leaves of the creepers twining there, and he was compelled to be much indoors. He now sat in the parlour, with his thin fingers stretched towards the blaze. His face looked worn and anxious, for it had cost him no slight pang to finally make up his mind to part with Kitty. He heard a footstep in the hall, and turning, saw Uncle Tom, wrapped up to his nose, entering the room.

“Are you ready, Tom?”

There was not its usual cheerful ring in Mr Fauntleroy's voice as he turned towards his brother. Tom, on the contrary, looked beaming with unwonted animation as he replied in the affirmative, slapping his hands together inside their rough, woollen gloves.

“Where's Kitty?”

“Here, dear old Dad.”

The girl, dressed for her journey, came quietly into the room and slipped down on to a stool in the dark corner by her father's side. She leant her head upon his breast, and taking his hands in her little gloved ones, kissed his thin fingers fervently. Then poor Nan, red-eyed, and with her pocket-handkerchief twisted into a hard ball, came in, looking very unlike her usual cheery, comfortable self. Silently she sat down upon a low chair facing the other two, and presently two tears, making little silver rivers on her florid cheeks, rolled downwards, to fall unnoticed upon her hands, which tightly held the handkerchief ball. Poor old Nan, gazing timidly across the hearth, silent, and with her tear-stained face, appeared the image of grief and despair.

They all sat thus for about five minutes. Then Uncle Tom, who had gone to help Pete get out the buggy with its old white horse, came back.

“All’s ready,” he called out, coming to the door and looking in. Turning to Nan, he said, “Are there any more bundles, Nan?”

Nan roused herself, and, rising, went slowly to see if all was right.

“Mind, Tom, that this box is kept turned this side up ; there’s some books in the bottom, and Kitty’s ball dress is on top, so it’ll never do to get it upside down.”

The simple creature knew naught of porters and their ways, and she looked solicitously at the trayless box which contained such ill-assorted companions as heavy books and a delicate white muslin dress. Kitty now appeared, sobbing bitterly, but quietly. She threw herself on Nan’s broad breast, and the two had to be forced apart by good old Tom, whose own cheeks were wet, but who knew enough to be aware that “tides and trains wait for no man.” Taking Kitty in his arms, he lifted her as if she had been a child into the old buggy, then jumped in himself. The cart with the trunks had already started, and

was, with much creaking, wending its way to the little depôt beside the Swannanoa.

.

“Uncle Tom, what has the train stopped for? Uncle Tom. . . .”

Tom stopped himself in the midst of a prolonged snore, finishing it up with a jerk

“Eh, what, Kitty! Stopped?”

In a moment he had roused himself sufficiently to understand her, and was looking out into the darkness beyond the track. Kitty looked into his kindly brown face with a sigh of relief. The train had stopped, that was true, but she was unaware of any danger in the fact; she had been awake all these long hours, too excited even to close her eyes; visions of home made the solitude very painful to her, and she was thankful to have an excuse for waking up Uncle Tom. The latter went outside to ascertain what the cause of the stoppage was. He soon returned, saying that there had been some slight breakage, and that the train must remain there on the side of a mountain until the guard could walk back some four miles, and telegraph for another engine.

“Wouldn't you like something to eat, Kitty?” he said, kindly, searching for the

big hamper in which Nan had bestowed enough provisions to feed half a regiment. "Take a pull at this;" Tom drew from his pocket a flask of old rye. Kitty refused this, however, saying she would rather have some milk.

"All right, Kit, but that's a poor sort of a drink to begin a journey on."

Tom's last word was partly smothered by the putting of the flask between his own lips. The drink did him good. He began to realise how pleasant a thing it was to be sent, as Kitty's escort, all the way to New York City, which he had never seen; and in particular, that the trip was to cost him nothing. Poor old Tom!

CHAPTER VIII

NEW YORK

“O fair young mother ! on thy brow
Shall sit a nobler grace than now.
Deep in the brightness of thy skies
The thronging years in glory rise,
And, as they fleet,
Drop strength and riches at thy feet.”

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

“BEG pardon, sir, but this young lady is Miss Fauntleroy, is she not?”

The neat person spoke with a slight French accent, and looked from Uncle Tom to Kitty as she did so.

“Yes, I am,” answered Kitty, quietly, seeing that poor old Tom seemed rather to have lost his head in all the noise and confusion of people running in every direction at once, and in the strong glare of the electric lights, which seemed to dazzle his unaccustomed sight.

“The carriage is waiting, miss, if you will follow me,” the maid went on obsequiously. “How many trunks are there, sir? If you will please give up the checks to the footman, he will attend to them.”

Tom began unbuttoning his overcoat in a hunt for the inside pocket in which the checks were. After some searching and much fumbling they were found, and handed to the servant in waiting. Uncle Tom, who had never been further than Charleston had never seen a “plush” before gotten up after the extreme of English fashion, and hardly, in the confusion of his sudden arrival in the midst of the lights and noise, knew what to make of this creature in silk stockings and powdered hair, covered with silver lace. However, dear old Tom, though a very rough diamond, was a gentleman, and did not permit his surprise to be evident; he felt a little like knocking the creature down when, in an Irish voice, but with a very English accent indeed, it minced out something about “The luggage.” Then the little procession moved out of the depot in search of old Mrs. Van Eyck’s carriage.

Kitty entered it, and poor Uncle Tom was

about to follow her, when the maid interposed with,—

“You must excuse me, sir, but Mrs Van Eyck desired me to ask you to excuse her, as her house is full, and for me to tell you that there is a very good hotel, called the ‘Murray Hill,’ close by, sir. Would you like James to call a cab to take you there, sir?”

“Oh, Uncle Tom, I cannot go without you,” almost sobbed Kitty, in her distress at this speech.

Poor old Tom stood irresolute, his foot on the step of the carriage and his hand on the door. Kitty saw his handsome, kindly face fall, as his deep eyes regarded her with the full light of an electric lamp upon him. He hesitated a moment, and then, withdrawing his hand from the door and stepping back, he said,—

“No, dear, you must do what your grandmother wishes. I guess I shall be very comfortable at the hotel, and I shall come around and see you to-morrow morning. Good-night,” he added, trying to get up some semblance of a smile, and drawing close to the carriage again he took Kitty’s little outstretched hand, which trembled as it lay

in his, and felt very cold even through the glove.

“Good-night, dear Uncle Tom. . . .”

A sob prevented her from being able to continue, and Tom, hurrying the lady's maid into the opposite seat of the carriage, closed the door quickly, and turned to get into the cab which the footman had secured, and upon which had been placed his own baggage.

.

“What do you say, Smith?”

“The carriage has returned, my lady, and the young lady is here.”

“Well, Smith, get her dressed—she won't be fit to be seen in her country clothes—and then bring her in here. I can talk to her whilst you dress me for the ball. Tell Marie to study my grand-daughter's complexion, and then put her into a tea-gown. The child needn't put anything more formal on to come up here. But do not let Marie make any mistake about the colours, and be sure to get her hair properly arranged.”

“Yes, my lady.”

The elderly and trusted lady's maid was moving quickly and silently towards the door, her footsteps falling noiseless upon the rich

carpet, and she was about to lift the heavy silken portière, when Mrs Van Eyck called after her in a high, cracked, unsympathetic voice, —

“Smith!”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Make the child eat something; she won’t be fit to be seen on an empty stomach.”

“Yes, my lady.”

This time Smith was allowed to leave the room without further orders from her mistress, who, since she had first spent a season in London, where she had been the guest of a countess, had always insisted upon her servants addressing her as “my lady.” “It sounds a much more fitting mode of speaking to their superiors,” was the method in which she usually explained this usage to a new acquaintance. It came to pass, therefore, that she was known in society by this appellation amongst its youthful and less respectful members. The old lady was seated now, wrapped in a magnificent peignoir of heavy yellow satin brocade covered with cascades of rich old lace. Diamonds sparkled on her fingers and drew the laces together at her throat—the latter had once been beautiful,

but was so no longer, owing to her thinness and advanced age. Her dark eyes, however, retained their brilliancy, and her limbs their youthful activity. Tall and very slender, many a young girl might have envied her her energy and powers of endurance.

She was seated now before a crackling wood fire, in the most comfortable of fauteuils, the latest French novel upon her knee; a cup of *café noir* upon a dainty little table at her elbow, upon which also lay the evening papers unopened.

When the maid had disappeared, silently behind the silken portière, the old lady drew up her rich skirts a little, displaying a very small and exquisitely slippered foot, which emerged from under the lace ruffles, and set itself firmly upon the edge of the gilded fender; then, taking up her French novel, she opened it at the page where she had left off. She turned her attention upon the printed page but, somehow it did not seem to interest her; the characters danced before her, and her hands dropped quietly upon her lap, whilst unconsciously her eyes filled with a far-away look, and fixed themselves upon the fire before her, between which and

herself, for greater comfort, a glass screen was placed. Sitting thus, she would have been called a very lovely old lady, had it not been for a certain sternness in the lines about her mouth, and the hard brilliancy of her eyes, which no tears came to dim, even though memory was conjuring up before them a vision of her daughter's besecching eyes and tear-stained face as they had appeared when the girl stood pleading for ungranted mercy before her in this self-same room, twenty years ago.

.

Kitty subsided, crying quietly, into her corner of the carriage as she drove off, leaving Uncle Tom to the pleasures of a strange hotel in this great and, to him, unknown metropolis. She felt very sad indeed, and was hardly comforted when Marie urged her to cheer up, saying, with her unfamiliar French accent, "That milady was very good, and that Miss Fauntleroy would, without doubt, shortly be the most *fêted* young lady in New York society." Seeing that her words had not the desired effect, she went on, "And there is the duke, too. . . ."

"I hate him!" cried Kitty, passionately.

“Do not talk to me about him! I won’t speak to him if I do meet him.”

After this rebuff Marie subsided into silence, and the carriage, rolling quickly up Fifth Avenue, soon stopped at a magnificent corner house, which extended itself all along the block in the side street almost to Madison Avenue. In a moment its great doors were thrown open, and Kitty was assisted to alight. A dry powder of snow was upon the ground, the first of the season, and, as it crunched under her feet, it recalled to memory peaceful reminiscences of her mountain home in winter, making the tears almost start anew.

In a moment more she had ascended the high stoop, and found her feet burying themselves deep in the heavy Persian carpets which covered the cold marble floor.

“If you will step this way, miss.”

Marie advanced deferentially before her young lady towards the wide curving staircase, which, dimly lighted, and having great banks of rich hot-house flowers upon its landings, appeared, to Kitty’s unaccustomed sight, a ladder of dreams leading to the recesses of some enchanted palace.

She followed the maid up its easy ascent,

and passing the rooms appropriated to her grandmother's use, she went down a corridor to a suite upon the same floor designed for her own occupation. Kitty noted the delicious warmth throughout this Fifth Avenue palace, heavily scented, as it was, with the odours of the lovely flowers which she met with everywhere. "Flowers, and such flowers, in winter!" Kitty, intoxicated with their magic perfumes, had almost forgotten that this was reality, and not some delicious dream. She was doomed soon to be awakened, however.

Marie, going forward, threw open the door of a boudoir, and pushing aside the portière she invited Kitty to enter. This room was as luxurious as all the rest of the house. Kitty, standing in its centre, and looking towards the bright wood fire, realised how beautiful its delicate colourings were; its dainty furniture and hangings, and lovely *bric-à-brac* scattered upon little tables, and what especially pleased her were some great white bear-skins forming a hearth-rug, and also thrown here and there upon the velvet carpet. She thought to herself that her grandmother, after all, must be very kind, and full of thought for her and care for her comfort,

and became almost grateful to her. She also comforted herself with the thought that she would soon return to her father; that this was only a visit, and soon—very soon—she would be permitted to go back to her mountain home, and to all the dear circle therein.

Her reverie was interrupted by Marie speaking about her baggage to the footmen who now appeared with it. Kitty turned and watched them carrying to her dressing-room beyond the plain, rough corded box which dear Aunt Nan had shown such solicitude over. She felt the incongruity of that dear homely-looking box and the two silken-stockinged footmen who carried it between them. Marie ordered them to take the cord off, and after they had brought in a rug-strap, the great hamper with its remnants and ruins of good Nan's cheer, and also, unfortunately, the hatbox which contained poor old Uncle Tom's best high silk hat, bought in Charlestown before Kitty's birth, used only on very rare and solemn occasions, and conserved with the greatest care by its owner. A pang of distress seized Kitty's mind as she recognised this hatbox, and she longed to

command the smart maid to have it sent to Uncle Tom, but felt shy of giving orders to this strange person.

“Might I have the keys, miss, and I will lay out your things. Would you like a warm bath? It would refresh you after your long journey. I have it drawn ready, and if you will come this way I will show you your bedroom, and the bathroom beyond.”

All the rooms opened into each other, as well as each upon the corridor without; Kitty passed through them, and the sense of being in a dream began to return to her. She entered her bedroom and went thence to the dressing-room, with its charming bathroom beyond. In the dressing-room Marie offered to relieve her of her simple thick cloth jacket and her plain black velvet turban, but Kitty preferred helping herself; and drawing off her heavy worsted gloves, began to remove her hat.

“Will you please give me the keys, miss?”

“Thank you,” said Kitty, independently, “I shall unpack my box myself. I know where to find the things; and you may go now.”

Before Marie could recover from her surprise the boudoir door opened, and a footman appeared carrying a chocolate service upon a

silver tray. Marie, turning to Kitty, asked her if she would like to drink a cup of the beverage before having her bath, and the footman, placing his burden upon a little table beside the fire, left the room again.

The sight of the chocolate was most welcome to tired Kitty. Pulling off her jacket she seated herself beside the fire, and Marie, though she had not asked her to do so, began pouring out her chocolate.

“Do you take much sugar, miss? It is sweet.” She handed the cup to Kitty. Suddenly, as she was drinking the chocolate, Kitty remembered that all this time she had seen nothing of her grandmother.

“Where is my grandmother?” she asked abruptly.

Marie seemed slightly nonplussed. “I beg your pardon, miss, but she will receive you as soon as you have made your toilet.”

Marie turned and busied herself in the room beyond, leaving Kitty to contrast painfully this welcome of her grandmother with that which she would have had from her father. Then her thoughts turned sorrowfully to Uncle Tom in his strange surroundings, and she wondered what he might be doing, and

whether he had had a good supper. Her chocolate and bread and butter finished, she rose to go into her bedroom; in doing so, she glanced into the mirror, and to her great surprise she noticed that her usually fair and brilliant skin looked dark and clouded. Involuntarily touching it with her little fingers, she looked at them and saw that they were black. Horrified at this discovery, she gave a little cry which brought Marie to her aid, who, seeing what had occurred, said,—

“You always find that after a train journey, miss; but your bath will soon make you comfortable.”

“Very well,” responded Kitty; “if you will leave me, I shall take it.”

“Wouldn't you like me to lay your linen out first, miss?”

“No, thank you. Go.”

Then Marie disappeared, going to the lower regions, where she informed the other domestics that her young lady appeared nothing but a savage, and, especially, did not understand the uses of a lady's maid.

Kitty, taking out her keys, opened her box—it was hardly to be called a trunk—and lifting its lid saw a painful sight. The books some-

how had got loose and come uppermost, and could be perceived mingled with the crushed remains of poor old Nan's *chef d'œuvre*. The dress which had lain so magnificently spread out upon the top of everything, with nothing whatever to crush it, so long as the box stood upon its bottom, now remained a mangled mass; at one side, the books wedging it down, and flattening all the wreaths, which had been, at once, poor Nan's pride and delight, till they looked like old and much-used cake ornaments.

A mist came before Kitty's sight as she stooped to lift out the precious robe. "Poor old Nan! was this the result of all her thought and labour?" Kitty had sunk down upon the carpet beside the unfortunate box, with the white dress and some of the books spread around her, her hand fell listless in her lap, and her mind brimmed over with sad thoughts. Suddenly, the pretty clock upon the mantel began to chime the half hour, and was answered by companions in the other rooms. Kitty gave a start, and remembered that, much as she would like to retire, she must yet dress and make her appearance before her grandmother. Selecting some linen

and a soft house dress of dark blue, she arose and went to the bathroom.

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“You may take me to my grandmother now.”

Kitty had summoned Marie to give her this command.

“But, miss, excuse me, Mrs Van Eyck—” she commenced, rather timidly, being a little afraid of the girl’s calm eyes fixed upon her —“Mrs Van Eyck has given orders for me to dress your hair, and she would be pleased if you would put on this tea-gown.”

As she spoke, she opened a great wardrobe, and lifted down a most exquisite “confection,” as she would have called it, covered with soft laces. Kitty standing, robed in her neat, quiet gown of sombre blue, with its collar closing round her pretty throat, and long sleeves buttoning to the wrists, regarded gravely the extraordinary mass of delicate silks now being displayed to the utmost advantage by her maid. It was as if a little brown linnet contemplated the plumage of some magnificent peacock or bird of paradise.

“Is that a ball-dress?” she demanded, unmoved,

“Dear me, no, miss. It’s a simple tea-gown, and here is the long-trained silk jupe to go with it; these lace ruffles set out the train of the tea-gown beautifully,” she went on, thinking, with terror, of old Mrs Van Eyck and her orders, and trembling to see how little inclined the brown linnet appeared to endow herself with the peacock’s plumes. “May I ask you to let me dress your hair, first, before you put this on?” she went on tentatively.

“No, you may not,” returned Kitty, decidedly. “Please take me to my grandmother immediately.”

“But, miss . . .” began the unfortunate lady’s maid, trembling for her good wages which she fancied she saw disappearing in thin mist.

“Take me to my grandmother.”

The order was so peremptorily given that the woman had no choice but to obey. With her face white, and limbs trembling under her, she turned towards the door.

Glancing backwards as they were leaving the room, Kitty saw beyond the door of the dressing - room a forlorn, white object still lying upon the carpet.

“Wait there a moment,” she said, motioning to the Frenchwoman to stay in the corridor; then turned back gently, to gather up and entomb poor old Nan’s work in her box. She had seen what they called “a simple tea-gown,” and felt that she would rather die than permit unsympathetic eyes to look upon, and sneering lips comment over, her poor wreck, product of so much labour and affectionate thought. Turning the key securely in the lock, she rose and went to join her maid.

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“Miss, would you be so kind as to let me call Mrs. Smith, so that she will know you are coming. Will you take this seat for a moment?”

Marie’s eyes looked so imploringly into Kitty’s face that the latter concluded to let her do as she liked, and, seating herself, waited.

Marie hastily tried to explain to Smith that her young lady had a will of her own, and Smith must try to, for her part, explain the situation as best she could to Mrs Van Eyck.

.

“What is this, Smith?”

The old lady regarded her grand-daughter with a stony stare, making no effort to bid her welcome.

“Excuse me, my lady—” began Smith, then turned an appealing face towards Kitty.

“Did I not give strict orders that she was to be decently dressed and her hair arranged?”

The old lady’s voice raised itself in her wrath till it reminded Kitty of the squeaks of the rats at home in the old barn. She saw the fear depicted on Smith’s face, but remained calm and immovable herself.

“Grandmother,” she began quietly, “I preferred wearing my own gown. Marie asked me to have my hair dressed and put on that tea-gown, but I had rather not, thank you.”

“What!” almost shrieked the old woman, and Marie, listening at the key-hole, paled. “What! am I to be defied in my own house by a chit of a child? What!—”

She had risen, and stood literally gasping with suppressed rage, supporting herself by the mantelpiece.

“Grandmother, I never intended to defy you. I—”

“Go at once and do as I bid you, then.”

The old voice broke on the high notes, and Kitty again remembered the rats. Smith looked fearfully at her mistress. She knew that these violent fits of passion were very bad for the old woman.

“Dear grandmother,” said the girl gently, surprised to perceive how much the old lady had set her heart upon what, to her, appeared a frivolous piece of nonsense, “I had no idea you really wished this, or I would have, of course, done it.”

As she spoke, she raised her lovely eyes to her grandmother’s face. Something in the tones of her voice and the expression of her eyes recalled the face in the fire to the other’s mind, and she softened. Stretching out her withered old hand towards the girl, she said,—

“Come here, child; you are very beautiful. Let me see you more in the light.”

As the girl stood beside her, she looked at her silently. Then, seeming again to take offence at the simple frock, she said quickly,—

“Go to bed, my dear,” Kitty’s heart gave a leap of relief. “No, stay. Let me see you once properly dressed, and then I can better consider what your possibilities are.” She added this last in a business-like manner, as

if she was speaking of some purchase she intended making.

.

Ten minutes later Kitty returned to her grandmother's room. Her hair was massed up high upon her head—she had done it herself, with two or three twists of her wrist and a slight rumpling of its wavy golden masses with her deft little fingers. Then the linnet had robed herself in the plumage of the peacock, and as a jewel in an exquisite setting she now appeared, metamorphosed and most lovely before her grandmother's delighted eyes.

"I think," said the old lady enthusiastically, "you are literally the most beautiful creature I have ever seen! Smith, order the carriage back to the stables; I shall not go out to-night. No, my dear," she added, turning again to Kitty, "I want to study you. What a triumph I shall have! The duke must certainly see that you are lovelier than all the others put together!"

Poor little Kitty, yearning for love and affection, found herself being considered in the category of a mere chattel, a creature to be put up for sale like any fair Georgian

slave. She shuddered as she looked at the eager old face before her, with its brilliant, greedy eyes and the hard lines about the mouth.

The old woman saw the shudder and said,—

“I hope you are not cold.” Then fear that this might be the case, and perhaps pneumonia might supervene, and spoil all her ambitious plans, she called hastily to Smith to take the girl to bed and not to leave her till she had seen her warm and comfortable. “Give her some hot wine and water!” was her command called after Smith as the latter closed the door.

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Poor little Kitty's head sank wearily upon the down cushions of her bed. Smith was closing the delicate lace and satin curtains about her to keep off impossible draughts. The wine and water had been drunk, and the girl was thinking, with an aching heart, of home and its simple habits. Her father's face came before her, with its pathetic eyes and thin cheeks. Turning upon her luxurious pillows, the girl wept bitterly.

Mrs Van Eyck was seated before her

dressing-room fire, whilst Smith brushed the remains of her once handsome hair. She was in 'special good humour, and seemed to have quite pardoned the episode of her granddaughter's appearance before her in her simple country frock.

"See that Madame Eliza sends to-morrow at eleven to take the orders for Miss Fauntleroy's gowns. Send for Redfern, too."

"Yes, my lady."

.

The clock was striking eleven in the neighbourhood of Uncle Tom's hotel. With the two windows of his bedroom thrown wide open upon the night he stood, the curiosity of a child expressed in his dark eyes, watching the vain efforts of a porter to turn off the steam register.

"They do say New York is a pretty bad place," smiled Uncle Tom, quietly. "I guess you all find it kinder wise to keep the heat up ter biling p'int, so as ter be a sorter prepared for the sweet by-and-by; but darn me if I can stand it, anyhow."

CHAPTER IX

THE DUKE

“Thus her heart rejoices greatly
Till a gateway she discerns,
With armorial bearings stately
And beneath the gate she turns :

And while now she wonders blindly,
Nor the meaning can divine,
Proudly turns he round and kindly,
'All of this is mine and thine.'
Here he lives in state and bounty,
Lord of Burleigh, fair and free,
Not a lord in all the country
Is so great a lord as he."

ALFRED TENNYSON.

“YOUR breakfast, miss, which Mrs Van Eyck has ordered served here in your rooms; she always has hers in bed, and there are no other visitors in the house at present.”

Kitty raised her pretty brows in surprise.

“I thought you told Uncle Tom last night that the house was full? Isn't it?”

Marie endeavoured to cover her confusion with a cough.

“Wasn’t that true?” persisted Kitty, and looked like an accusing angel at the delinquent maid.

“Excuse me, miss, but I have to obey orders. Would you like me to post those letters?” she hurriedly continued, seeing a sheaf which Kitty had written lying upon the table. But Kitty continued, nothing daunted,—

“Then there was room for poor Uncle Tom after all?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, miss; my lady is not very strong, and I don’t suppose she feels equal to entertaining gentlemen. . . .”

“But I thought you said she was going to give a ball on Thursday?”

“Yes, miss; in honour of you, miss. And Madame Eliza has your dress all made, but only to fit on the waist.”

Before more could be said, the door of the boudoir opened and a footman entered, and commenced arranging a dainty breakfast for Kitty.

“My lady told me to tell, you, miss,” went on the maid, “that anything you wished for you were to tell me to get for you.”

“Thank you,” answered the girl coldly. She

was thinking of her own and Uncle Tom's lonely breakfasts, and wondering how it was she was prevented from having him with her.

.

Kitty had finished her solitary breakfast, and was just about to leave the table when the door opened and Uncle Tom entered.

“Oh, Uncle Tom!”

Kitty's voice sounded a note of relief and happiness. Running towards him, she threw her arms round his neck, and kissed his weatherbeaten brown face rapturously.

“Oh Uncle Tom! Uncle Tom!” Then taking his rough stick from him, and gently removing his old black soft felt hat from his head, leaving his abundant black hair somewhat ruffled by the operation, she was about to turn from him when her joy at seeing his familiar face again overcame her, and, still with the stick and hat in her hands, she again threw her arms around him and kissed him fervently. “Dear old Uncle Tom, I am so glad to see you!” Turning towards the table she went on, “Have you breakfasted? Shall I ring and get you some hot coffee?”

But Tom had breakfasted an hour before,

and needed nothing more. Removing his warm brown overcoat, he glanced about him, at the different pretty objects in the room, and said, with a smile of satisfaction, to Kitty,—

“You’re pretty nicely fixed here, dear; I hope you like your grandmother? She seems kind to provide all this elegant place for you.”

“Yes,” answered the girl, indifferently, “but tell me how you get on at that strange hotel. I cannot bear your being there,” she added quickly

Seeing his pet vexed, Tom put his hand upon her shining hair, and looked down affectionately in her fair, upturned face.

“Don’t you fuss, Kitty; I’m fine over there.” Then remembering the steam register, he added, “That’s to say if they don’t roast me to death. ’Pears to me that they do keep the houses too hot up here.”

“Ah!” laughed Kitty, “now I understand. Never mind, dear Uncle Tom, we’ll go out together and see the city. Would you like to go at once?” she asked rather wistfully.

“Why, yes, certainly,” he exclaimed, in his hearty Southern manner. “You don’t worry

about me, but get your bonnet on right away."

Kitty ran away, her happy face glowing with satisfaction, leaving the door of the dressing-room open behind her. Uncle Tom, meanwhile, moved about examining everything with an expression of much contentment upon his kind, brown face. Presently his peregrinations brought him to the door of the dressing-room. Looking in, he caught sight of his cherished hatbox.

"Why, Kit," he exclaimed, joyfully, "after all, you've got my hat; I was kinder sure it was lost." Then he said innocently, "I think I had better get it out, and wear it to go out in the city with you."

As Kitty stood putting on her thick woollen gloves, she watched him unfasten the beloved package; it was done up in heavy brown paper, and tied with string. Uncle Tom had been careful to keep it near him during the journey, and only the confusion of their arrival in New York could have caused him to let it out of his sight. Now, he rubbed the nap the right way with his coat sleeve twice, and looked with satisfaction to see that there were no dints in its shining surface. In a few

moments more he was ready to accompany Kitty on a voyage of discovery through the city.

.

Eleven o'clock had come and passed—twelve also. Mrs Van Eyck sat in a solemn conclave with the dressmakers over stuffs, designs and Paris models. Smith, standing respectfully in the background, gave her opinion only when her lady appealed to her for it.

Meanwhile Kitty and simple old Uncle Tom had wandered away to Central Park to see the animals, neither of them taking any heed of the hours, nor thinking of the necessity for returning. At one o'clock they began to feel very hungry, and for the first time Kitty thought of luncheon.

“Oh, Uncle Tom, what will my grandmother say? She may be waiting dinner for us.” She turned her lovely blue eyes upon Tom, and the two looked at one another much as truant children might have done on perceiving that discovery was imminent.

“I do feel very hungry,” admitted Tom, sheepishly.

“Well, we'll ask that man over there to

direct us, and get back home as fast as we can," was Kitty's practical reply.

.
"Kitty!"

"How do you do, ma'am?"

Mrs Van Eyck was just leaving the luncheon-room as the other two entered the great hall. Without taking any notice of Uncle Tom's salute, nor, indeed, appearing to perceive that he was there at all, the old lady, with head held high and cold, unbending brows, turned severely upon Kitty.

"My dear, I must tell you that young ladies in society do not go running about in all sorts of extraordinary places without their *chaperones* . . ."

"But I had Uncle Tom," interpolated Kitty.

"My dear," the old voice grew shriller as Mrs Van Eyck's anger visibly increased, "a gentleman is hardly a proper person . . ."

"Well, ma'am, she . . ." began poor Tom.

"Pardon me, sir." For the first time the old woman turned towards him, and her eyes glared with such a terrible light that Tom quailed again, and a cold shiver passed down his broad back at sight of her. He prudently remained silent for the rest of the interview.

“Understand, Kitty, that as long as you are under my roof you cannot leave the house without my permission. Now, as I wish to drive you to Madame Elisa’s at three, you had better let Marie get you your luncheon in your own rooms, and she will dress you afterwards.”

Having thus made Kitty understand that all freedom was denied to her, the old lady turned to unfortunate Uncle Tom, and said, in her coldest tones,—

“You will pardon me, sir, but you will understand that my grand-daughter is now in my charge. Good-morning.”

Even to simple old Tom there was no doubt of this being a speech of dismissal. It was difficult to turn away with an empty stomach from the sight he had of the delicious and abundant luncheon, which he could perceive through the open door of the dining-room; but there was no help for it. Turning towards Kitty he was about to wish her “Good-bye,” when she interrupted him impulsively, by saying,—

“Dear grandmother, Uncle Tom is very hungry.” The old lady’s brow drew themselves into a harder line. Kitty perceived the

sign, but continued valiantly, "Please let us lunch together in there?" pointing to the dining-room.

Instead of replying to this question, the old lady turned upon Tom and demanded,—

"When do you intend to return home, sir?"

"In a few days, ma'am—when I have seen something of York."

The old woman was softening a little; something in Uncle Tom's frank eyes pleased her, when, suddenly, she perceived his hat, that "object" as she spoke of it, later, to Kitty, decided her. If people did not understand the art of dress, they could not expect her to invite them to her house.

"You must excuse me, Mr Fauntleroy," she said, coldly, "but I have to take Kitty out." Bowing to Tom, she turned away, saying, "Come, Kitty."

Kitty, greatly distressed, stood wringing her little hands together.

"Good-bye, dear," said Tom, quietly, longing to comfort her and kiss away the tears which he saw standing in her clear, innocent eyes. He held out his hand. Seeing Mrs Van Eyck's back turned, Kitty flew into his arms for a moment, saying hurriedly,—

“Don’t worry, dear Uncle Tom. Come in the morning early, before she’s up, and we can at least chat together.”

Kissing him warmly, she turned and ran lightly up the stairs after her tall, elegant grandmother.

.

The next three days passed away in a whirl for Kitty. All was in confusion, and the house had been given over into the hands of the decorators, though how they could make it more lovely than it was already Kitty failed to imagine. Her grandmother had been very kind to her, loading her with rich presents and beautiful clothing. Perceiving that Kitty had a will of her own, the old lady thought best to coax rather than attempt to control her. She knew that only by this means could she hope to influence the girl, and the latter would, later, have it in her power, perhaps, either to fulfil or destroy the ambitious dreams with which she had indulged herself ever since she had heard of the coming visit of this English duke. For the last two weeks society had been in a ferment over his visit, and he and his friend, Lord Inver-

ness, were being *fêted* and entertained by everybody.

Poor Kitty was tired of hearing his praises from everyone who met her grandmother, and was determined to hate him later when she should meet him. She was not very happy, for she had hardly seen poor Uncle Tom since their morning in Central Park together. She had asked her grandmother whether he was coming to the ball, but could not obtain any decided answer from the old lady. On the evening of the day before the ball, she stood in her boudoir, her elegantly-shod little foot extended towards the fire, and she, herself, looking downwards into its comforting blaze. She had just returned from driving with Mrs Van Eyck in the Park, and had not yet taken off her handsome furs. To-day was the first time she had seen the Park since her visit there with Tom, and she could not help contrasting the two, thinking that they were as unlike one another as was her simple country costume with the magnificent furs of which she now commenced disembarassing herself.

“Please, miss, your uncle called and left this for you,” said Marie, taking from her

the furs, and handing her a note hastily penned by Tom on finding her out.

The note contained a letter to Tom from Kitty's father, and the former thought it would please her to bring it to her. Telling Marie to give her some tea, Kitty coiled herself up in a large, low *fauteuil* to read the missive. She had received one from her father, herself, that morning, and she found that the one she now read was but a replica of her own, except that there was a postscript in which her father told of the long-delayed arrival of Will Bell from Texas. "We think he will cheer up Bessie, who has seemed very dull and low-spirited lately," he wrote.

The letter read, Kitty remained dreamily gazing into the fire, made sleepy by its warmth. She wished she had not missed Uncle Tom. Visions of her father and home floated mistily before her, and she seemed to hear good Nan calling her. Five minutes later, Marie, coming softly in with the tea, found her sleeping peacefully, the letter fallen from her hand upon the carpet.

"I'll let her be," the latter thought, setting down the tea. "How beautiful she is."

Marie stood regarding the sleeping girl

with admiration. She was beginning to feel the charm which Kitty exercised over all she met, and to like her young lady. Besides, the lady's-maid had ambitions, and would have been well pleased to be in the service of a duchess—the gossips of the servants' hall seemed to think that the duke must, of necessity, fall in love with Kitty the moment of his presentation to her—and thus Marie had hopes of possible future advancement, and surely, if so, of a sight of her beloved Paris once more.

Kitty continued to sleep, innocently unaware of all the schemes of which she was the centre, from her own grandmother down to her French maid.

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Poor old Tom was beginning to tire of the everlasting rush and hurry of the great city. The noise deafened him, the people were so unlike those of his own State and village, where everybody knew everybody else, and all each other's affairs, much like one family. Here no one knew you, and no one cared whether you lived or died, so that you did not happen to interfere with his own individual ambitions and well-being.

On the evening of Mrs Van Eyck's ball, Tom was sauntering down Fifth Avenue thinking it was about time to dine, when, to his intense delight, he met De Montfort; the latter, on his part, seemed equally delighted to see Tom.

"Come into Delmonico's and dine with me," he said heartily, after the first salutations were over. Tom, nothing loth, cheerfully consented, and they went in together.

"Malcolm promised to join me here, so it will be quite like old times," De Montfort said, as they entered the dining-room. Poor Tom gave a great sigh of relief at this thought. His so-longed-for visit to the great city had, so far, been nothing but a dismal disappointment. Deprived even of the society of Kitty, he had wandered about the crowded streets all day, his feet blistered by the hard pavements, so different from the country-roads he had been accustomed to all his life. Sometimes he heard himself saluted by the impudent street gamins as "hayseed," and was often asked "Where he got that hat?" These things, and many others, had made him low-spirited; but the principal reason of his gloom upon this special evening was that his darling little

Kitty was to make her appearance at her first ball and that he would not be there to see her. This had cut the affectionate creature to the heart, and he knew that Kitty, perhaps, felt it almost more than he did himself, and the knowledge of his exclusion by her cold-hearted grandmother would lessen her pleasure.

Now, as they entered Delmonico's crowded rooms, Tom glanced at De Montfort's kind, manly face, and thought that in him he would find a confidant who would sympathise with him in all his woes. And in this he did not err.

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Mrs Van Eyck, erect and tall, and most distinguished in her exquisite toilette of amber velvets and old lace, the latter held by the diamonds for which the old lady was so famous, stood receiving, with much content, the guests whom she had made happy with invitations to her great ball. Beside her was Kitty, perfect in her loveliness, gowned in some diaphanous robe of white. Her blue eyes looked wondering upon this throng of well-dressed people. She heard, with blushing shyness, the many compliments paid to

her grandmother upon her account, and wished the people would not stare at her so much. She thought of Bessie's longing to go to just such a ball as this, and wondered if she would enjoy it.

Many had been the demands made upon Mrs Van Eyck that she should permit her granddaughter to dance, but the old lady refused them all, saying it was necessary that Kitty should remain and continue to receive with her. She was determined that none but the duke himself should be permitted this honour. But he had not come yet, and she began to look anxiously at each fresh arrival, fearing that perhaps some mishap might have occurred to upset all her plans.

"My dear, do not look so very solemn, remember one must always smile in society," she hurriedly whispered to Kitty, and then, as if to carry out her own axiom, turned with sympathising sweetness to listen to the senile platitudes of a toothless old diplomat at her side.

Kitty was thinking of dear old Uncle Tom, left out of this gay throng, and probably sitting alone in his little ugly bedroom at his hotel. She did not feel very cheerful, and it struck her sensitive perceptions that the compliments and

polite speeches of these fine friends of her grandmother all sounded the same, and were delivered in the same insincere tones and perfunctory manner. The smile which she endeavoured to assume at her grandmother's bidding died away, and her little fingers began painfully intertwining themselves to the peril of her long, white gloves, as memories of home, her father, Nan and the sweet lost summer came back to her, making her forget her grandmother, the ball, and the brilliant assemblage gathered about her. She found herself wondering sadly what had become of De Montfort, and recalling that last happy day when he had taken her and placed her in her hammock, under the tall, arching trees. These last had been so green, and in the pride of their summer beauty then, "Now . . . why had he gone away so suddenly . . . why? . . ."

"The Duke of Chandos, Lord Inverness and Mr Thomas Fauntleroy!" shouted the footman.

Kitty turned her head quickly. That hated Duke! . . . De Montfort! Malcolm, and Uncle Tom! Impossible! Her head swam; she felt a mist before her eyes, and her little hand lay cold and dead in De Montfort's.

Mrs Van Eyck almost forgot her anger and surprise at the sight of poor old Tom, looking extremely handsome, and carrying himself with his usual simple dignity in one of the duke's own dress suits, in her delight at finding that, apparently, the duke and Kitty were old friends, for she saw them now chatting beside her, the girl's paleness and *distracte* air changed into a look of interest, and her lovely eyes beaming with pleasure, whilst her colour burned so brilliant as to make her red-gold hair and the darker lines of her eyebrows and lashes appear even more unusually beautiful than ever. Such colouring as hers is very rarely seen, and when it does appear, it certainly eclipses that of all less-favoured women. Malcolm was talking to Mrs Van Eyck herself, seeking to cover the probable embarrassment of dear old Tom, whom he and the duke had determined should see his Kitty's triumph and be made welcome in the house of her grandmother, and thus had brought him with them, though, for his own part, Tom had had many misgivings as to what sort of a welcome awaited him.

Mrs Van Eyck, meantime, was wondering how it had been that Kitty had not mentioned knowing the duke, and hated Tom worse than

ever for not quickly informing her that he was such an intimate friend of the latter's, in which case he should have been invited to stay in her house and partake of the very best it afforded.

"May I have the pleasure of this first dance with Miss Fauntleroy?" said Wyndham.

Mrs Van Eyck delightedly acquiesced. Everything was progressing much more favourably than even her wildest hopes had anticipated. Kitty, blushing, smiling and happy, went off upon the arm of the duke, to the envy of all the other girls in the room.

"You do not want really to dance, do you?" was his first word. "Would you not rather let us talk for a little first? I want to hear of all that has been happening down South."

Kitty was only too delighted with this idea. She was so happy; all the past two miserable months seemed to have been a dream, and he, still the same as when he used to read to her, and fetch and carry for her, at good Aunt Nan's bidding. He looked so handsome and so happy; the scene, first uninteresting and stupid, now seemed like some fairy dream; the lights, the music, the sweet perfumes, and, above all, the sound of his voice, talking to her as of old, fairly intoxicated her. She was happy.

She even forgot for a time that he was the duke—the duke whom she had intended to hate, and, if possible, escape from. Now she sat with him chatting as innocently as a little child, listening and laughing at the funny account he gave of the manner in which he had met good old Tom, and persuaded him to face her grandmother, the dragon, and come hither with him and Malcolm to see her. He, too, was dangerously happy. He had suffered so cruelly for his folly during these months of their separation, that he told himself that, just for this evening, he would forget all the past, and only remember that he had found her again. He had sat talking long over the wine at Delmonico's, and perhaps the champagne was responsible for his present temper.

“And now let us have this valse,” he said, rising and offering her his arm.

Kitty had been telling him of all her troubles about Uncle Tom and her grandmother. Then, suddenly remembering everything, she exclaimed,—

“But why did you never tell me you were the duke?”

She was still sitting, and a bank of pink azaleas backgrounded her to perfection. De

Montfort, looking down into her upturned eyes, thought that he had never seen a creature more lovely.

“You forget you told me yourself that you hated titles and titled men, and so I was afraid; and when Malcolm came, I persuaded him to help me keep the secret. He was afraid it was sailing under false colours, and his conscience was not quite easy upon the subject, but I over-persuaded him. You are not angry?” he asked suddenly, looking earnestly into her innocent, upturned face.

“No, I am not angry”—here she withdrew her eyes from his and drooped her head—“but I wish you hadn’t,” she said simply.

“Forgive me, dear,” he said hoarsely, and his pulses beat wildly, as he noted the exquisite turn of her bent profile and the whiteness of her shoulders. He had never seen more than her throat before. Fairly intoxicated with her beauty, he reseated himself beside her. He had forgotten Bessie and the past.

“Kitty, dear, say you will forgive me?” he pleaded.

Her lips trembled; she could not answer him; she was troubled. This part which he

had acted had been a lie. Herself the embodiment of truth, she was hurt by the slightest deviation from it in one she loved; and he had seemed so perfect. She remained silent.

“Why do you not answer me? Kitty . . .”

He had drawn closer to her. The girl felt a strange weakness as his breath fell upon her cheek. It was so sweet to hear his voice pleading thus for pardon.

“Kitty, tell me that—” He had forgotten Bessie, honour, prudence. In another moment it would have been too late, and he would have asked Kitty to love him, but at this instant Uncle Tom and Malcolm appeared, seeking them.

“I want to tell you some good news, dear,” said Uncle Tom, happily, with rather a mischievous smile. “Your grandmother has invited me to stay the rest of my time here in the house, and she has ordered my traps to be brought over from the hotel.”

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“Come and take your chocolate with me my darling; I want to hear how it was that you never told me you knew the duke.”

Mrs Van Eyck, in the best of spirits,

wound her arm round Kitty's slender waist, and drew her into her own boudoir. Kissing the childish face, which looked a little pale and thoughtful, she continued,—

“You were certainly the belle to - night; everybody said so, and I am very proud of you. Why, the duke is devoted to you already.”

Kitty blushed deeply and gave a little shy glance sideways at her grandmother, but said nothing. She was thinking, “Perhaps if she, too, thinks so. . . .” Then she blushed again, even more deeply, and hung her head, as if abashed by her own thought.

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De Montfort dismissed his valet immediately upon his return from the ball. Lighting a cigar, he stood smoking, and lazily looking into the fire. What he saw there must have worried him, as his brows drew together, and he puffed savagely at his cigar.

“What a fool I have been!” he muttered.
“What a cursed, cursed fool!”

Then he began to pace savagely to and fro. Presently he stopped and went to a sideboard, and, taking up a spirit decanter, poured himself out a glass of brandy, which

he drained; then he returned and resumed his old attitude at the fire. His brow retained its troubled lines, and the fire-faces still looked back at him with sad, accusing eyes. Throwing his unfinished cigar into the flames, he was about to turn away, when he stopped, and taking from his pocket a small note-book, he opened it and looked long and tenderly at a face within, sketched in pencil by himself. It was Kitty. He had done the drawing unknown to her one day as he sat near her, when she was reclining in the old hammock under the trees. Now he gazed at the sweet face, then, with a long-drawn breath, closed and restored the little book to its place. Moving towards his bedroom, he muttered,—

“Yes, a cursed, cursed fool!”

CHAPTER X

THE SEALED LETTER

“So live that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan which moves
To that mysterious realm where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not like the quarry-slave at night ;
Scourged to his dungeon ; but sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.”

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

“PETE ! oh, Pete ! where are the letters ?”

“Here dey is, sah ; two on 'em—one is from Mis' Kitty, and one is from Mister Tom.” Old Pete's coal-black face beamed as he entered the breakfast-room, first having shaken the dry powdered snow from his hat, and unwound from his neck and shoulders a huge horse-blanket which enveloped them. “Here dey is.” He extended the letters and some newspapers to his master.

“Mr Fauntleroy's delicate, worn features

reflected the pleasure expressed by Pete's face ; he smiled contentedly as he recognised the familiar handwritings.

"Now we shall hear about the ball," said Nan, eyeing the letters with great interest. As she watched her brother carefully cut open both envelopes after his usual methodical manner, she was wondering as to the success of her ball dress. Kitty had never told her of the sad misadventures that had befallen it. The pale winter sunshine through the window opposite illumined the kind, plain face, and her eyes returned her brother's smile as he quietly drew Kitty's letter from its envelope, and glanced quickly down the first page. Suddenly he stopped in his reading, went over a passage he had just read again, with such a look of astonishment upon his face as to cause Nan to demand,—

"Why, what's the matter, brother?"

"Well, I can hardly understand, but it appears that De Montfort is the duke, and . . ."

"Duke?" cried Nan. "Wyndham de Montfort the duke!"

"Why, yes, and Malcolm is Lord Inverness."

"My!"

Nan sat lost in astonishment, her mouth pursed into a round "O," and her eyes opened to their widest extent. Then another thought struck her.

"My, but what will Bessie say?"

"Here she is, along with Bell," Mr Fauntleroy replied, as from his seat he saw them approaching on horseback under the leafless trees of the avenue. Nan wondered how Bessie would take the news, for the latter had always surprised her good, simple aunt with her longings after riches and a great marriage, and many were the discussions between them on this head. Nan holding that contentment with one's lot, whatever it might be, was the surest road to happiness; which sentiment Bessie would always deride with scornful laughter, telling Nan that if she knew the world better, she would not enunciate such nonsense as contempt of wealth.

Mr Fauntleroy, who had been quietly finishing his correspondence, now looked towards his sister, and laughed.

"It appears that as soon as Mrs Van Eyck found out that brother Tom knew De Montfort, she insisted upon his taking up his residence at her house on Fifth Avenue. He says that,

but for Kitty's sake, he would have stayed away, but the child welcomed the idea of his coming with delight, and so he has gone there."

"Doesn't he say anything about the ball?" inquired Nan, with interest.

"Yes here is a postscript." Handing the letter to Nan he pointed to the passage. It read, "Tell Nan, with my love, that our Kitty was the belle of the ball."

"I wonder he didn't say anything about if her dress was admired," grumbled Nan, beginning to read the letter from its commencement, whilst Fauntleroy began tearing off the wrapper of a newspaper which Tom had sent.

At this moment voices were heard in the hall, and Bessie and her tall squire entered the room.

"Well, what about the ball?" were her first words, on coming in, as she looked towards the letter in Nan's hand. The ride had brought a lovely colour to her cheeks, and she appeared more than usually handsome in her olive-green habit. Will Bell at her side regarded her with eyes which plainly told his admiration.

"You'd never guess what has happened," Nan commenced, anxious to tell the news,

Seeing Bessie's look of inquiry, she hastened to add, "De Montfort. . . ." Then she stopped dead, afraid of the expression of the girl's face at the mention of the name.

"Well, what of him?" Bessie demanded, coldly, her voice so changed that, involuntarily, both the gentlemen turned and looked at her, surprised. Seeing Will Bell's eyes upon her, and Nan sitting open-mouthed watching her, she burst out angrily, "What's the matter with him? Why can't you tell the news, Aunt Nan, instead of gaping at me?" she added rudely.

Thus adjured, Nan rushed at her subject.

"He turns out to be the duke himself?"

"What!" cried Bessie, her face blanching, and catching with both hands at the table for support.

"And Malcolm is Lord Inverness. You could have done gone and knocked me over with a chicken feather," went on Nan, beginning to put together the tea things, "when Uncle George read it out of brother Tom's letter."

Will Bell's face lowered, and he squared his heavy jaws ominously as he watched the way in which Bessie received the news,

“By —— she does care for that —— English swell,” he thought fiercely. “I’ll be —— if she can fool me, and I’ll keep a mighty tight hand over her for the future.”

“I must say,” Mr Fauntleroy commenced, “that I hardly thought De Montfort a man who would pass himself off as other than he was in another man’s house, and I shall be glad to hear what explanation he has to give of such conduct. I always considered him and Malcolm gentlemen till now.”

“Then you were mistaken, Uncle George,” cried Bessie. “I guess he’s no sort of gentleman, to act as he has done. But he’ll repent it,” she added angrily.

The colour had returned to her face, burning red with the excitement she felt, and her eyes flamed with rage over what she considered the duplicity of the two Englishmen in having concealed their identity from her.

“But I’ve got him fast enough,” she reflected; and then there came a rush of hatred against Kitty in her heart as she remembered De Montfort’s evident love for her, and that, now the girl, with every advantage of beauty, wealth and position was able daily to see and meet him in New York; whilst she,

Bessie—his promised wife—remained neglected and alone. Had she dared to do so she would have at once proclaimed her engagement to De Montfort, but something she read in Will Bell's eyes restrained her. She dared not face the consequences of the jealous Texan's wrath; she would temporise, and wait until he was safely gone home again. "Then . . . then . . ." she thought, vindictively. At the same time she fairly reeled with joy; it seemed to her that she must scream aloud as she began to comprehend that this was not a dream; that, in fact, all the dreams of all her discontented girlhood were about to be realised, and that she, Bessie, was the promised wife of an English duke . . . that she would become an English duchess. . . . Leave the dull country, go to Europe, be welcomed by the English queen, be envied for her beauty, rank and riches, by all women less fortunate than herself. . . .

These thoughts, and many more, coursed through her brain, filling her with a sense of triumph, and in trying to conceal which, from the searching regard of the man to whom she had been engaged for three years, she only succeeded in becoming insolent.

"What has come to you, Bessie?" he asked savagely, cutting at the table leg with his whip; "I guess you needn't fuss over this d—d English duke. He's nothing to you, anyway. You . . ."

A wicked smile lifted Bessie's lips and showed the teeth with something of menace.

"How do you know that?" she sneered, interrupting him.

"What," he cried, turning round upon her, his eyes flashing fire. By instinct she shrank slightly backwards; in his fury he had half-raised the riding-whip, as if to strike her.

Seeing that she was goading him too far for her own comfort, she pretended not to have seen the uplifted whip, and with a little contemptuous shrug of the shoulder next him turned and began to move towards the kitchen.

"I must go and help Nan with the breakfast china," she said indifferently.

"Stop a minute," he called out, striding after her; "you are not generally so mighty ready to help anybody." Here he laid a heavy hand on her shoulder. "You just stay right here, and explain things to me a bit."

The grip on her shoulder hurt her, and his

voice sounded so menacing that Bessie, bold as she was, quailed a little. She stopped unwillingly.

“You leave me alone, Will Bell,” she said sullenly. “What right have you to lay hands on me? How dare you!” She had turned towards him, and glared up savagely into his dark face, its features swelled and distorted with rage. Facing each other thus, they looked like two tigers at bay. Bessie’s bold, grey eyes met unflinchingly his fierce, black ones. “You needn’t try to bully me. You, Will Bell. You have got check; I suppose you take me for an Indian squaw.” Then, taking courage at his silence, she went on, “After this exhibition of your jealous temper you can just consider our engagement broken off.”

“Never!” he hissed through his teeth, taking a furious hold of both her wrists, “never!” Here he bent his head forward over her, so that she could feel his breath upon her, as he went on in a low, suffocated voice, “Never, Bessie Barmore; don’t think you can fool me that way. You will be my wife, or . . . or . . .” Bessie at last, fairly intimidated, shrank a little. Seeing her quail he

gripped her wrists tighter. "No, you needn't think to fool me. Now, I know what has changed you. Before this d—d duke came around here, you were pleased enough to be engaged to me. If you could have got your folks to give us five hundred dollars, you would have married me, and set up store right here in ——ville three years ago. Well, you weren't content to marry me on what I had, but never ceased with your cursed ambitious views till you had driven me out west, away from home, and folks, and mother." His voice grew husky; Bessie tried to release her wrists, he only held them as in a vice. "Yes, mother broke her heart and died, all because of your cursed vanity. Do you think I forget the loneliness of those days upon the prairies with na'ry a soul to speak to, never a sound save the lowing of the beasts by day, and the howls of the coyotes at night. The scorching heats of summer, and the freezing cold of winter. Hunger, thirst, danger from Indians, horse thieves, and all the scoundrels who crowd to the borders of civilisation because they cannot, or dare not, remain in a country of white men. By God! Bessie Barmore, you have made me endure

all this, and much more, for your sake, and now do not think you can cry hot and cold, and pitch me aside like an old moccasin, just because your ambition leads you to regard plain Will Bell as a nobody beside your d—d English aristocratic friends. No, by heavens! you shall marry me now or die—do you hear? Have I told you plain enough?” He shook her, furious and maddened at her insolently smiling mouth, and bold, defiant eyes. She had gotten over her fright of him, and stood swaying her head slightly as if to punctuate his speech.

“Let go my wrists,” she said carelessly. “If you don’t, I shall call Uncle George.”

At this moment Nan came bustling into the room followed by Pete.

Bell dropped Bessie’s wrists, giving her, at the same time, a look which would have frightened any less foolhardy creature than herself.

Tossing her head by way of response, the girl turned, and ran lightly upstairs to the room she always occupied when staying here with Nan. Locking the door behind her she sat down on the side of her bed to think.

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An hour had passed. Bessie, her eyes flaming with excitement, opened her door stealthily, and, looking out, listened. Then she went softly down the staircase and into the parlour. Securing some writing materials, she returned quietly to her own room with them. Again locking the door, she sat down to write at a small table near the window, and was soon so engrossed with her occupation that she did not notice the heavy footsteps of Will Bell ascending the stairs to seek her. She had finished her letter and was looking over it, with a satisfied expression, when, with rough, determined hand, Bell knocked upon the door.

“Ain’t you going home to dinner?” he demanded, savagely.

“No, you can go right back without me; say I am coming home to-morrow.”

“What’s that for?”

“You just let me be. I’ll stay on here till you learn how to behave yourself. You bet I will!”

Standing on the other side of the door, Bell’s face fell. He had a jealous, ungovernable temper, but, as Bessie well knew, was most passionately devoted to her. Now, on

hearing her determination, he suddenly became penitent. The prospect of thus losing her society for several days seemed unbearable to him. At the same time he hated giving way, and having to humble himself before her. Pretending not to have heard her last speech, he called out,—

“Say, oh, Bessie, shall I tell Pete to bring around the horses in an hour? You know you promised to go sleigh-riding this evening.”

Bessie smiled as she noted his change of voice. She wanted to post her letter, and she liked driving in the new sleigh he had bought on purpose for her use. Wrapt up to the eyes in the warm furs he had brought her, and which skins he had killed and cured with his own hands, sewing them, painfully, together as he sat thinking of her beside his fire alone in the long, cold nights of a Texan winter, Bessie loved to go gliding over the hard snow to the tune of the merry bells beside him.

“Oh, all right, I don’t care. Order the horses if you like; it’s all one to me,” she called out, with affected indifference. Still he did not move away.

“Oh, Bessie!” His voice had taken on

a coaxing tone which her ears were quick to note. "Oh, Bessie!"

"Well, what do you want now?"

She was slipping the letter into an envelope.

"Say, won't you open the door just one minute?"

His voice sounded more persuasive than ever. Bessie's brow cleared. Telling herself that in this mood he was much less formidable and more likely to be influenced to do as she desired, she slipped the now sealed letter into her pocket and went to open the door. Throwing it wide she stood and faced him.

"Well, what is it?"

She assumed a rough, careless tone, not intending to let him know how greatly his changed mood contented her.

"Bessie, dear, let's make up. I am afraid I was a kind of a brute to you this morning. Give us a kiss, old girl, and let's forget it."

He stood fearful before her. She had fixed him with her cold, round eyes, much as a cat secure of its prey might do. She took no notice of his outstretched arms, with their mute supplication for peace. She was thinking how coarse and red and large his hard-working hands appeared in contrast with those of De Mont-

fort, and wondering how she could ever have thought of being his wife and loving him.

“Make up, dear,” again he pleaded, and this time, emboldened by her silence, he threw his arms round her and kissed her passionately. She suffered his embrace coldly, silent still, and he suddenly became conscious of her lack of response. All his jealousy of the morning returned, stirring his soul to its depths. As he angrily threw back his head, he looked beyond her into the room, and caught sight of the table with the writing materials strewn upon it.

“Who’s that letter to you have been writing?” His voice choked in his throat, and his fists clenched. “Who’s it to, I say?”

“Only Uncle Tom.” She tried to control the fear in her voice. What if he should want to read it, and seize it from her? In his passionate rage he was capable of any violence.

“Show it me,” he demanded; and there was that in his eye and voice which compelled her, as if under a spell, to put her hand in her pocket and draw forth the sealed letter. It bore the address of Mr Thomas Fauntleroy, at Mrs Van Eyck’s, New York.

Will Bell took it in his hand and read the superscription. The heavy dull red in his face died down, and the great chords in his throat and forehead lessened as he did so. Slowly reading the written words over a second time, he drew a deep breath.

“By God! I thought you’d been writing to that ——” he said, very slowly, giving the letter back into her cold, trembling hand. He did not see that her face had blanched to the lips. She had turned quickly back into the room, gripping the letter tight, in terror lest his mood might change, and he demand to see its contents.

CHAPTER XI

“THEY CAN’T FOOL ME!”

“There are gains for all our losses—
There are balms for all our pain;
But when youth, the dream, departs,
It takes something from our hearts,
And it never comes again.”

RICHARD HENRY STODDARD.

“To ride in the Park! Oh, how very lovely!”

Kitty clapped her hands with delight; Mrs Van Eyck glanced at the duke, and seeing that he was not scandalised by Kitty’s frank expression of pleasure, did not chide her for her childishness.

Uncle Tom was, as usual, a quiet spectator, his handsome face illumined with a pleased smile, as he looked from Kitty to De Montfort. The latter was radiant with pleasure. Remembering Kitty’s delight in riding, he had come to ask Mrs Van Eyck’s consent to her joining Uncle Tom and himself on the morrow, and was well assured beforehand of her giving

it. He was too clever not to have observed how ready the old lady was to favour him in all things, and especially to throw him and Kitty together. More passionately in love than ever, De Montfort strove by every sophistry to assuage his conscience; telling himself that he alone would suffer from their continual meetings in society, and that these were inevitable; and also that Kitty's feeling for him was no more than a childish affection, as for any friend who might be near her. He told himself, also, that she was engaged to another man, and so must be safe in his society. With these, and a thousand other arguments, he strove to excuse himself to himself for being always at her side.

Between him and Malcolm had arisen a coldness indefinable to either, but standing like a wall between them. Upon Kitty's first arrival in New York, Malcolm, seeing the turn things were taking, had ventured, by way of reminder to De Montfort, to ask the latter whether he was still engaged to Bessie. A curt reply in the affirmative, coupled with the remark that, as Kitty herself was engaged to another man, there could be nothing for anyone to carp at, was all Malcolm received for his pains. He was forced

to maintain silence whilst his own heart ached profoundly, and his mind was perplexed by this unexpected news of Kitty's supposed engagement. Thus it had come to pass that the two friends became estranged, and saw less of each other than formerly, only meeting in society, or at clubs where they had both been made honorary members, when they each sought to avoid the other.

Naturally, in society itself men all stood aside, considering that Kitty was already monopolised by the duke, and already rumours were rife regarding the expected announcement of their engagement. Mrs Van Eyck herself promoted, and delighted to welcome these, expecting every day that De Montfort would declare himself. Malcolm, knowing the truth, stood by pained and helpless, longing, but unable, to set things right. It had never yet occurred to him to doubt Kitty's being affianced to another man, and he noted her innocent pleasure in De Montfort's society with surprise, wondering whether all women were alike flirts, and to be dazzled from their faith and allegiance by the glitter of wealth and glamour of a title. With the loss of his belief in Kitty came disbelief in all

good; and his happy, optimist nature began to be oppressed and disturbed. He found himself taking very different views of life from those he had held until now, and the change made him sad and reckless.

Failing the society of De Montfort, he attached himself to Uncle Tom, and the latter found himself "seeing life" in a manner and with a thoroughness which made him sometimes fairly catch his breath. When he feebly tried to remonstrate with the young man, Malcolm would ridicule him in a manner very unlike his former genial self, laughing at his country notions, and making poor old Tom feel very bad, from a religious point of view. Thus it came that the two went along together; Malcolm leading with reckless deviltry, and Tom weakly following, his hair on end with horror, and the fear of everlasting damnation before his mental vision. Neither, at this time, found much contentment in their lives.

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Time flew by in a continual whirl of balls, dances, theatre-parties, luncheons, driving and riding in the Park. Kitty, without losing her love and longing for her people and her home, had gotten accustomed to the continual riot of

pleasure around her. She even took great delight in it all, knowing that it would only last for a season, and she need not exchange this for longer than a few months for the life, friends and home she loved best. Innocently happy in the diversions with which she was surrounded, her child's eyes saw only the fairy glitter of what was about her. The shams appeared real; falsehood stimulated truth; shadows, substance; envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness hid their faces from her pure gaze. She saw only life from its most agreeable point of view, and took everyone at his own valuation.

Could she have known enough to pause and analyse the reasons for her present joy and contentment, she would have discovered that, for her, everything resolved itself round De Montfort, and, without him, all would have been changed, and society have presented itself under very different aspects to her view, and her life in it become dull and insipid. Experience had yet to be her teacher.

One morning, Kitty, clad in her riding-habit, sat awaiting the arrival of De Montfort to accompany her and Uncle Tom for their usual ride in the Park. These rides had come

to be a habit with them now, on all fine days, and De Montfort told himself there could be no harm in them because of Tom's presence there. Kitty was sitting, giving her little feet a last toast before the pleasant blazing Liverpool coals, when the duke and Uncle Tom came in together, both looking ruddy and handsome from exercise, and bringing with them the indescribable fresh scent of the outer air of New York, upon a crisp, bright winter's day.

Kitty had risen, and they were about to go out together to the waiting horses when a footman entered, handing a letter to Uncle Tom. He was about to slip it into his pocket for later perusal when Kitty cried out,—

"Oh, Uncle Tom, it's from Bessie; do open it."

De Montfort's face paled a little; biting his lip fiercely, he turned his head so as to avoid Kitty's eyes. But she was not thinking of him; she was eagerly watching Uncle Tom as he tore open his letter.

"Oh, there is one for me, I am sure!" she cried, putting out her hand for an enclosure which Tom found within his own letter. "Give it me."

He gave it to her, without looking at its superscription, and she hastily tore it open and began to read, dropping its envelope upon the carpet at her feet. Quickly De Montfort stooped to pick it up and restore it to her. In doing so he could not help seeing the address written in Bessie's great, flourishing hand,—

To

H. R. H.

THE DUKE OF CHANDOS,

New York.

A spasm of horror seized him. Crushing the paper convulsively in his palm he looked at Kitty.

She stood, her face pale, her brows knit with a puzzled expression, staring at the letter in her hand.

At this moment Uncle Tom, who had been searching for his glasses, without which he could not read, said quickly,—

“Give me that back, Kitty; it's for you,” he went on, turning to De Montfort, and handing him the letter he had taken from Kitty's unresisting fingers.

"What can she mean?"

De Montfort's hand shook as she turned her clear eyes upon him, and asked this question.

The letter ran:—

"Dec. 4th.

"Tell Uncle Tom if you mean to keep your promise or not. You need not tell him what about. But get him to write to me *at once*. *Do not write yourself*, as it may bring trouble. *I have kept the secret.*

BESSIE."

De Montfort cursed himself, as, having read Bessie's words, he looked up and met Kitty's clear, questioning gaze. Uncle Tom, without knowing it, innocently blundered to his assistance with,—

"Bessie says you have never paid your bet of gloves, and she wants to know whether you are going to keep your promise or not? She says I'm to write and tell her, 'yes' or 'no.'"

Tom had not proceeded far with this speech when Kitty, with a little sigh of relief, said,—

"Never mind the gloves now; let us get our ride before the snow begins."

.

Three days later Bessie was passing the little village post-office on horseback with Will Bell. Just as they were getting to the end of the street, a voice crying, "Bessie, Bessie," arrested them. Turning, they saw running, bareheaded, the red-haired youth who minded the office with one eye, whilst with the other, and the rest of his mental capacity, he sold tapes, buttons and other nondescript articles to the residents of the little town. Breathless, he reached them, and handed up to Bessie a long package, done up with great care, and a letter in Uncle Tom's writing. Feeling Bell's eye upon her, Bessie coloured, and pretending to take no interest in the letter and package, stuffed them carelessly into a satchel she was carrying.

"What's that?" asked Bell, eagerly, trying to scrutinise the contents of the satchel.

"They got the New York mark on 'em. I guess, Bessie, you've got a beau *there*, too, haven't you?" said he of the post-office.

Bessie frowned angrily at the red-headed lout, leaning with his arm thrown over her horse's shoulder, and without even thanking him for his trouble, gave her animal a cut

which sent him bounding forward, and nearly deposited the unfortunate youth in the road behind her.

"It is no good trying to fool me, Bessie; show me what's in that package."

As he said the words, with an adroit movement he snatched the package from its hiding-place, and, in spite of all Bessie's persuasion, alternated with threats and abuse, he rode off quickly with it back in the direction of the town, leaving Bessie to follow or not, as she pleased.

When he had disappeared round a bend on the shoulder of the mountain, Bessie ground her teeth hard, and, giving her horse a savage stroke with her heavy whip, started off in a gallop towards home. After she had gone about a quarter of a mile, she suddenly drew rein. "The letter," she thought. Then she took out Tom's epistle and swiftly glanced through its contents. As she came towards the end, her face brightened, and she smiled triumphantly. She laughed out loud, and the shelving mountain side, rising above her, echoed back her words.

"He'll keep his promise. He'll keep his promise."

She laughed again aloud.

With her letter still open in her hand, and the reins hanging loosely, she did not seem to notice that her horse had taken the law into his own keeping, and had commenced getting home at a brisk walk. Suddenly Bessie seemed to recall herself from dream-land. She sought for the envelope, and was about to restore Tom's letter within when, to her surprise, she saw that there remained inside another sheet. She drew it out impatiently, wondering what more he had to tell her.

“*P.S.*—I almost forgot to tell you, Bessie, that, if you will never be a duchess yourself, you stand a very good chance of being cousin to one. All New York is talking about the duke and Kitty, and Mrs Van Eyck seems to think that the engagement will be announced any time now. Kitty seems very happy, and so does De Montfort, except occasionally when he gets a black fit on him I have never seen the equal of. He and Malcolm hardly speak to each other when they meet, though I can't guess what's up between them. Malcolm goes the pace kinder hard, but he's a rare good

fellow, and I'm darned if I ever thought an Englishman could be such good company.—
Your affectionate UNCLE TOM.

“*P.P.S.*—I’ve bought a new hat, also some fine store clothes. You won’t know me when I come back. The old lady has grown very civil to me, and says she can’t part with me yet. Best love to all.”

Bessie slowly re-read every word, each moment her face growing paler as she, with difficulty, gathered the sense of what was written. The revulsion of feeling from triumph to bitter abasement had been so sudden that even yet she could not realise her position. Suddenly, with a long, bitter cry, came the words,—

“He is only fooling me. He will *not* keep his promise !”

Letting her head fall forward upon her breast, she caught her breath in great, hard sobs, her wide-open, tearless eyes bent, sightless, upon the black mane of her chestnut, while her hands fell hopeless and helpless upon her knees.

It was supper-time in Bessie's home. The cold winter's evening had closed in, and

the family sat round the long table over the last and most pleasant meal of the day. Will Bell had not yet returned, and Bessie sat before the big coffee-boiler, dispensing the hot fluid to the many little sisters and brothers who sat expectant about her, having already attended to the needs of her handsome, stalwart father, and her pretty, little, fragile mother, sitting nestling to his side.

“Where’s Will?” demanded the former, looking towards his vacant place. Mrs Barmore had already wondered at his absence, but something in Bessie’s expression warned her not to put this question to her.

“I guess he’ll be in directly,” the girl answered, with affected carelessness. Her mouth grew harder as she spoke, and she turned abruptly to frown down the importunities of the child next her, who was clamouring for more sugar.

At this moment the door opened and Bell entered and seated himself in sulky silence. Bessie, without speaking to him, poured out his tea, and pushed it towards him. His place was next her at the table, and Mrs Barmore’s quick eyes noted the savage look he cast the girl sidewise under his eyelids, as

he drew closer his cup, and plunging his spoon therein, stirred up the sugar violently. On entering, he had gone to deposit his hat and whip on a bench at the side of the room; Bessie glanced over there now, and saw that her parcel was also placed there, underneath his soft felt hat. He was still in his big riding-boots, which were splashed to the knee as if he had ridden very hard, and his face looked flushed with the exercise he had taken. "I guess he *is* in a rage now," Bessie thought, glancing at his heavy, lowering expression. At this moment Mr Barmore asked him where he had been, and not waiting for any reply went on with,—

"I thought you and Bessie were riding together this afternoon?"

Bessie trembled as she saw the dangerous flash in Bell's eyes, as he turned and looked full at her.

"So we were," he answered gruffly.

Mrs Barmore, keenly sensitive to the disturbed mental atmosphere about her, here hastily interposed with a demand upon her big, kind husband's attention, saying she was cold and needed a shawl. This was enough for Tom Barmore; throwing his arm lovingly

about the slender little figure of his wife, he drew her fondly against his side, at the same time telling one of the little girls to run and fetch the old black-and-white-checked shawl which had been forgotten in the parlour. When it came, he rose, and wrapped it carefully about the clever little woman, who had known so well how to keep her simple giant always her devoted slave and lover, and saying to her that it was warmer for her in the parlour, led her carefully from the room, returning a minute later for her tea, which remained unfinished on the table.

As the door closed behind the elder couple Will Bell raised his head, and gave a look, full of menace and meaning, at Bessie.

"Send these brats away," he muttered, through his closed teeth.

Bessie tossed her head defiantly, and met his eyes in a look of bold contempt.

"They'll go when tea is finished, not before," she answered, at the same time beginning to rise from the table.

"No, you don't." His voice came in a whisper, hoarse with rage, as he seized her wrist and held her prisoner beside him.

"Let me go." She strove to free her arm

from his vice-like grip. "Let me go, I say," she muttered sulkily. His fingers closed tighter yet, and he rose and stood facing her.

"Do you mean to tell me you dare accept presents of gloves from another man, when you are engaged to me? Damn you!" he added, *sotto voce*, glaring down into her face, and violently shaking the arm he held.

Seeing that the case was desperate, Bessie assumed an air of calm which she was far from feeling. She responded to his fierce look with a cold stare of contempt.

"You see here, Will Bell," she said, in a hard voice, her throat grown dry with fear, "you see, here; I am tired of you and your nonsense, and I don't mean to be the slave of any man living. You can get back home as soon as you like, you . . ."

"Do *you* dare to tell *me* that? Do you dare?"

"Yes, I do dare, and you can go as soon as you like, too, and get out of here," she added brutally.

"By God! I think I'll kill you!"

With his disengaged hand he seized the back of her graceful neck, compelling her to

bow her head, as a lovely flower bent by a furious wind. She felt his fingers about her throat, saw his gleaming eyes—fierce, burning—close to her own, felt his breath coming like fire upon her cheek, and trembled as she remembered that men, before now, had killed women for less than he supposed her guilty of against him. He had left her wrist, and now his other hand closed upon her throat, marking the delicate flesh with its strangling, maniacal fingers.

The children, until now, had supposed the scene one of horseplay, and looked on amused. Now, suddenly, fear seized the one nearest, who could see Bessie's blanched face with its look of agonised terror, and she jumped screaming to her feet. In a moment all the others did the same, their laughter changed to terror by some electric shock of sympathy and the quiet tea-room became a very pandemonium. The sounds recalled Will Bell to himself. Lingeringly his cruel fingers relaxed their hold as if loth to lose their promised vengeance. With a curse he freed himself from the children clamouring about him, and without another look at Bessie, he strode to a French window, flung it open, and disappeared

hatless into the darkness of the winter's night.

Bessie sank, cold, and shivering violently, into her seat; the children clustered wildly curious about her. Suddenly, overcome by the sense of relief she experienced at her escape, she bowed her head upon her arms, and sobbed hysterically.

“Go and tell father to come here.” She had ceased crying, and turned a tearful face upon a little brother who stood by, awestruck to see her weep.

As the child ran to do her behest, she rose and crossed the room. Pitching aside Bell's hat with a contemptuous gesture, she took up the duke's packet of gloves and opened it. No letter was within the pretty box, only the long, dainty gloves in their various tints, crammed back in wild disorder by Bell's jealous hands.

“I wonder if he knew *who* sent them?” she thought. Then, with a sigh of relief, she remembered that there could not have been a letter, as she had told De Montfort not to write one.

The door opened and her father entered the room.

Ten o'clock had struck. Bessie lay tossing upon her bed, her cheeks feverish, and eyes brilliant with excitement, round her neck a wet handkerchief was bound, but it had not removed the dark marks of Will Bell's murderous fingers. Mrs Barmore, her shawl drawn tight about her frail body, sat at her daughter's side, silent and perturbed. The clock ticked on loudly, no other sound disturbed the silence save now and then Bessie's impatient stirring of the bedclothes.

"Hark!" she cried suddenly, "there's the sound of a horse coming up to the porch."

They both listened eagerly, Bessie springing bare-foot to the window and throwing it wide.

"He's gone," she whispered back to her mother, "I can see him in the moonlight, galloping down the yard."

They both turned their heads as the door opened admitting Tom Barmore.

"I gave him your message, Bessie, and forbade him to set foot in this house again," he said simply. "How are you, my girl?" The old giant put his arm around the lithe, tall figure of his daughter, and kissed her affectionately, where she stood near the still

open window. "Come, you'll sure catch cold," he said, and with his arm still about her, he closed the window and led her back to bed. Bessie flung herself in a sitting attitude on to the side of the couch, near her anxious mother.

"Father," she asked earnestly, "are you real sure he'll never come back? I want to be certain he's gone. You ride into town first thing in the morning, and let the folks know I've given him the mitten, and find out if he took the seven o'clock train."

"Don't you fuss, child, Jake's got orders to take his traps after him before it's light. He's gone, safe enough. Now, you, come along." He had turned towards his wife, and putting his arm round her, drew her from the room. "Good-night, Bess," he called out as he closed the door with a loud bang.

When they were gone, Bessie, with her hand upon her throat, as if to protect it from attack, sat thinking deeply for some time. Then her brows suddenly drew together in a fierce frown. Rising from the bed, she threw a warm, woollen dressing-gown about her, then, searching in the pocket of her dress for Tom's letter, she drew it out and seated

herself near the lamp to read it, her bare feet hastily thrust into her slippers. She read the part about the duke and Kitty over several times, her face pale and mouth set hard.

“Now I’m free,” she muttered, “they shall see. They can’t fool *me*.”

She drew her writing desk to her and began a letter, her pen scratching noisily as if joining its menaces with her own, her face very pale and resolute.

“They’ll see,” she muttered; “they’ll see.”

CHAPTER XII

LOVE

“My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep ; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite.”

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

(Romeo and Juliet, Act II.)

“MY dear,” said Mrs Van Eyck to Kitty,
“when do you think the duke will declare
himself?”

Kitty blushed painfully and remained silent, looking into the fire. They were seated together in the library over their afternoon tea, having just returned from a cold, dull drive in the Park.

Mrs Van Eyck was growing anxious. She was well assured of the duke's affection for Kitty, and had lost no opportunity of throwing them together on every possible and impossible occasion. For nearly a month she had daily looked for De Montfort's declaration, and, knowing that society was watching her

manœuvres and their result with jealous expectancy, began to feel some mortification when her friends daily clustered about her, begging to be told if they might yet present their congratulations.

Kitty stirred her tea nervously, blushing still, and looked into the blaze before her. She wished her grandmother would desist from questioning her. For some reason, undefined even to herself, she felt sad. She no longer concealed from herself that she loved De Montfort, and she felt assured that, ever since the summer days down South, he had loved her; it comforted her to feel that he had been the first to love, and a shy shame almost overpowered her when she was compelled to acknowledge to herself that she returned his love with all the passionate warmth of her Southern nature.

Something, however, in his manner filled her with a vague sadness; instead of the triumphant joy of love, conscious of reciprocation, she felt depressed in his presence; she divined that, for some unexplained reason, he suffered, and that her presence near him intensified this suffering. De Montfort, for the first time in his life, felt honestly

ashamed of his conduct. Instead of having from the beginning avoided Kitty since they had met again in New York, he knew he had, weakly and criminally, delighted in every excuse society, or her grandmother, gave him to be near her. At first he had salved his conscience with the sophism that he was indifferent to her, but lately he had felt that he could no longer pretend this. Showing her every attention, monopolising her in society, never losing an opportunity of being at her side, he knew that he had rendered her conspicuous, and made her food for gossip and speculation for everyone at the clubs, and in the boudoirs of the New York social world. He knew there was only one honourable course left him, which was to make her his wife; but since the advent of Bessie's letter, he had begun to realise that this was impossible—Bessie, herself, would never permit it. He felt that she had but to speak, and all Kitty's innocent love for him would be shattered at one blow, founded as it was upon false premises. She believed him to personify her ideal of all that was noble, good and true. De Montfort knew this, and bowed his head upon his hands, as

he had to confess himself abjectly weak, cowardly and false.

Mrs Van Eyck glanced at the girl's averted face, and saw the little white hand steal up and spread itself as a screen between them.

"What is the matter, child?"

"Nothing," came the quick reply; but the old woman thought she could detect tears in the voice which made it. Becoming surprised and suspicious, she demanded sharply, her own voice trembling in her anxiety,—

"You don't mean to tell me, Kitty, that you have refused him? Speak at once. What *do* you mean . . . ?"

"Oh, no."

The words were spoken low, and Kitty, in her misery at this cross-examination, let fall her fan. As she bent to repossess herself of it, the door was thrown open, and the duke himself announced.

Mrs Van Eyck looked inexpressibly relieved. De Montfort came forward and greeted them both with his usual pleasant manner, assuming an ease which he was far from feeling. The room had not yet been lighted, and the fire-glow filled it with a charming sense of warmth and comfort. The duke advanced to

where Mrs Van Eyck, with both hands extended in her delight at seeing him, was greeting him with effusive politeness; then he turned towards Kitty, and looking down upon her where she sat before the fire, silently took her proffered hand in both his own, whilst his eyes sought her upturned face with a glance more eloquent than any words.

A moment later, Kitty, blushing, withdrew her hand, and bent her head to hide the confusion she felt.

De Montfort turned to address Mrs Van Eyck; as he did so, the door closed softly. The old lady had been far too experienced to intrude her company upon them at this juncture.

.

The bright flames of the Liverpool coals had died down, leaving nothing but the red glow of the fire. Kitty was still sitting where she had been, before De Montfort's entrance, and he had thrown himself into a corner of the lounge beside her. They were silent; but each felt that this silence was fraught with greater significance than any words could have expressed. Kitty's heart

beat wildly as his hand stole warmly over her own, and his voice whispered, very low,—

“Kitty.”

He had drawn close, she felt a sense of delicious vertigo as his breath fell upon her neck; her blushing face bent lower still. In another moment the temptation overcame him; the silence, the heavy perfume of the flowers about them, which intoxicated, the soft warmth of the fire, which caressed the delicious obscurity of the dusk which environed them—everything tended to destroy any feeble good resolutions which he had made to assuage his tortured conscience. As he bent all too near her, his eyes devouring the exquisite curve of her throat now exposed in all its loveliness by the turn of her averted face, he lost all control over himself, and bending yet a little nearer fastened his lips in a long, passionate kiss just below her little ear. Kitty trembled violently at this burning contact; involuntarily her fingers closed closer upon his, her head drew towards him, and her breath caught itself in a little frightened gasp; she felt she could not move, she felt compelled by some delicious mesmerism to remain passive as if enchained in a sweet nightmare. De

Montfort's arm had stolen about her shoulders he was kneeling by her side now, and his lips, grown bolder, had sealed themselves upon her virginal mouth.

.

De Montfort had risen ; bending over Kitty, he half lifted her to her feet beside him. With his arm wound round her slender, trembling body, he drew her nearer to the dying fire.

“Kitty,” he whispered, bending and pressing his kisses on her hair. “Kitty you *do* love me ? You will . . .”

“Lord Inverness and Mr Fauntleroy.”

Following upon the announcement of their names, came the two gentlemen, and a moment later, the footman had dispersed the delicious mystery of the love-filled room, by touching an electric button, and flooding every corner with rose-tinted light.

Uncle Tom came forward and kissed Kitty's burning cheek without perceiving anything unusual, but Malcolm's more delicate perceptions in a moment led him to divine the scene they had unwittingly interrupted, “Curse him !” he thought, glancing after Kitty's slender, retreating figure, as upon some excuse

of hearing the dressing-bell, she fled from the room—"curse him, has it got that far." His eyes sought the face of the friend who had once been his mentor, and whom his youthful imagination had formerly endowed with every noble and manly attribute. The other, knowing himself under scrutiny, drew himself to his height, returned Malcolm's glance with one of haughty coldness, and turning to Uncle Tom, said, without considering what he was saying, or what Tom's answer might import to him,—

"Well, old fellow, have you heard from your people in the South lately?"

"Yes," answered Tom, innocently, "and I have a letter for you."

De Montfort's face paled as he recognised Bessie's bold hand; he hated Malcolm at this moment, for he, too, had seen the writing.

"I am afraid I must leave you fellows," he said hastily, "as I have to dine with friends."

A moment later Tom and Inverness found themselves alone.

.

When Kitty had reached her room, she dismissed her maid, and throwing herself into her great lounging-chair beside the fire, burst into a

passion of tears. The revulsion of feeling had been too much for her already tired nerves. She remained with her face buried in her hands for many minutes, and was so engrossed in her own thoughts that she did not perceive the door open to admit her grandmother.

“My dear,” began the elder woman in a tone of great anxiety. “My dear Kitty, what has happened? Have you *refused* the duke?” she added hastily, a sudden fear seizing her. “Tell me,” she urged, as the girl remained silent.

“No, grandmother. . . .”

“Hasn’t he proposed?”

“Not really . . . yet . . .” she added sadly.

“You mean, I suppose, that he was prevented by Lord Inverness coming in?”

“Perhaps.”

Then Kitty roused herself, determined to stop this questioning.

“Please leave me, grandmother; I really want to think and to be alone.

Mrs Van Eyck saw the wisdom of complying, and, advising Kitty to sleep for an hour, swept her trailing velvets from the room.

When the door had closed after her, Kitty arose, locked it, and threw herself upon a

couch. There had come smiles now instead of tears, and her eyes were beaming with happiness. Burying her face in the soft cushions to hide her blushes even from the inanimate objects about her, she murmured,—

“He *does* love me; I know it now. I know it . . . Oh, I know it. . . .”

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CHAPTER XIII

“MARRY YOU, AND NOT FIRST TELL PAPA ! ”

“Did I seek Love? Not so; Love led me along by the hand.

Love beguiled me with songs and caresses, while I took no note of the land.

And lo! I stood in a quicksand, but Love had wings and he fled.

Ah fool, for a mortal to venture where only a god may tread.”

ANNE REEVE ALDRICH.

DE MONTFORT strode down Mrs Van Eyck's stoop in no enviable frame of mind; he knew he had been mean and cowardly and, hating himself because of his latest actions, he yet had not the courage to arrest his course to keep his word to Bessie, leaving Kitty in peace. The frosty evening air met him with its bracing influence; he had been used to enjoy it, but now he shivered and went on faster up the avenue towards his hotel. Locked in his room, he drew from his inner pocket Bessie's letter, and read it, standing still in his overcoat and hat. Crushing the

paper fiercely, as he finished the reading of it, he thrust it, crumpled, into a pocket, and going to the sideboard, poured out some brandy and drank it. Then, removing his hat and coat, he threw himself into a chair and began to re-read the letter, with frequent pauses to think.

“It is impossible,” he exclaimed aloud; “I cannot do it. . . .” Springing from his chair, he began pacing the length of the apartment. . . . “If I could persuade Kitty,” he thought, “if not . . .”

He continued his walk to and fro. Suddenly he stopped.

“I’ll see her to-night,” he thought, “at the ball. *She* shall decide for me.”

His brow cleared, and he looked relieved; his resolution was finally taken, and Kitty herself should decide his fate for him. Should she consent to his plans all would be well—so he told himself—forgetting that nothing born of dishonour and bred in deceit can ever be well.

.

At dinner Mrs Van Eyck wisely refrained from seeming to notice that Kitty appeared pale and abstracted. It was the night of

Mrs De Peyster's ball, and the wise old lady determined that it should not be from want of aid from herself that the duke should lack a further opportunity of seeing Kitty alone. "To-night shall decide his fate," she thought, glancing, unobserved at the girl sitting silent and preoccupied beside her.

To Kitty, the events of the day, since the coming of De Montfort, appeared some dream. She could not believe in their reality, and, oblivious of her grandmother and her surroundings, sat wrapt in sweet abstraction. "Should she see him to-night? and would he tell her? . . ." The memory of his kiss returned; she shivered slightly.

"I hope you have not caught a chill, my dear?" from her grandmother, brought her errant spirit back again into the realms of prosaic reality.

.

"Kitty, will you give me this valse?"

The duke spoke very low, with a tone of caress in his voice, as he bent above her where she stood beside Mrs Van Eyck. They had only just arrived, and De Montfort had been watching near his hostess for their coming almost since the opening of the ball.

“Will you, *dear?*” Something in his eyes made her heart beat, as it had done when he knelt beside her chair, his arms encompassing her, his lips upon her own. For a moment she felt as if she would fall, and her limbs almost refused their office, as, leaning upon his arm, he led her to the ballroom.

“My darling,” he whispered, pressing the hand within his arm, against his side. They were in the throng outside the ballroom; Kitty shrank closer to him. It was, as if they two moved in a world apart, the people about them being but an accident. It seemed a dream, still — the commencement of some sweet enchantment.

“Do not let us waste time any longer here,” he said, in one of the pauses in the valse, “I *must* speak to you; I have waited all night for the chance to tell you all I wanted to when we were interrupted. Come along,” he added, holding her closer still to him for a moment as they stopped; then, giving her his arm, he led her into a small room filled with plants and flowers, and seated her upon a lounge behind a high bank of pink azaleas. Placing himself beside her,

he drew her to him, and again his lips sought hers in a long, passionate kiss.

Love had come to Kitty as a surprise, had she been less innocent and more worldly, De Montfort's influence could not have gained so great an ascendancy over her. She had no longer any will of her own; she loved him with the blind, unquestioning idolatry which some women—though rarely Americans—bestow upon a man. His will had become her law, and in her sight he could do no wrong.

De Montfort was not slow to perceive the advantage he had gained, and determined to bend Kitty to the accomplishment of the ends he had in view. Bessie, in her last letter, had threatened to come to New York and tell Kitty everything. Should this happen, De Montfort judged rightly, Kitty would be lost to him; therefore he had formed a plan, by which he hoped, with Kitty's unconscious aid, to outwit Bessie, and make the girl he loved his wife. Under the influence of his passion for Kitty, he had become so enthralled that his promises to Bessie, his pledged word, honour—all were forgotten; all the energies of his mind were centred upon one thought—to make Kitty

his wife, and let the future take care of itself. Could he but compass this, nothing else need count with him. Unbridled passion, once suffered to get the ascendancy of a man's nature, in a weakly, self-indulgent character, is capable of instigating him to any meanness, spurring him forward to any dishonour.

“Marry you, and not first tell papa!”

For a moment De Montfort's new gained power trembled in the balance. He watched her keenly.

“Darling, you know my horror of scenes and fuss. You know your grandmother and—well, I think your great love for me”—his voice became caressing—“should enable you to look at the matter from my point of view. We could be quietly married. I know a clergyman here who would be only too pleased to carry out my wishes.” He did not tell her that he would have to lie about her age, and she knew nothing of such things. “Once married, nothing would remain for us but the congratulations of all our friends. . . .”

“But Dad . . . ?” commenced Kitty. De Montfort's face changed colour; he compressed his lips, as he interrupted hastily,—

"He will be the first to understand; he is very fond of me, too; *you* know that yourself, Kitty, don't you?"

He looked earnestly into her shy, questioning eyes, he saw the trouble there, but his selfishness compelled him to continue the sophistries by which he hoped to gain her reluctant consent to his project. He knew she would never give it willingly as her nature was so frank and open; that it would need his every argument to persuade her to do anything about which there could be the least question of right and wrong. He frowned as this conviction forced itself upon him. He felt the hand so confidingly left in his become cold; even through her glove, its chill struck him. This should have warned him not to trifle with her love; to such a character as hers, once the object of its affection is shown in less noble colours than those with which, in the full trust of its faith and innocence it has invested it, it becomes worthless, or worse, hateful and repulsive.

Kitty shivered slightly; a strange revulsion of feeling had been occasioned in her by his words. By an electric chord of sympathy he divined this change in her. His eyes were

bent upon her with a fierce light in them ; Bessie's threat recalled itself to his mind. In order to quench Kitty's fears, his voice took on a tone of indifference. "You know, dear, your father cannot possibly object to our marriage.

He was thinking how absurd it was to have to plead with her thus. Any other girl, he thought, would not have hesitated.

"But, at least, let me write to Dad and ask his permission," pleaded Kitty.

For a moment his quick temper threatened an outburst. Controlling himself, he said, with forced calmness,—

"Kitty, forgive me, but I must beg you to do nothing of the kind. Remember you have promised me now," he went on, speciously, sinking his voice very low. He had drawn close to her again. Experience taught him that contact with one she loves makes a woman very weak to resist his influence. "Kitty, I shall not believe you love me at all. . . ." He looked into her eyes, and passionately kissed the cold little hand, which he had released from its long glove, then held it between both his own and went on with his arguments.

Kitty remembered her father and Nan, and for a moment the old home influence seemed about her once more. Viewed in the light of wishing her to deceive them both, he seemed changed. Could this be her hero who was so true and upright that he could do no wrong? Yet, was it wrong after all which he desired of her? She knew her grandmother wished this marriage, and, as De Montfort carefully pointed out to her, Mrs Van Eyck must be certain of Mr Fauntleroy's consent, since she gave himself such encouragement. The poor girl became confused as she listened to De Montfort's words. She loved him; she longed to do as he wished; it was so hard to refuse his first request; and yet . . . and yet. . . . She felt ready to cry with the bitterness of it all, and great tears filled her eyes. De Montfort kissed them away before they could fall, saying,—

"You are tired, darling. I think I have proved clearly enough that I am asking nothing but what is right and reasonable of you. You are going to be my wife — you know you are"—he was watching her again narrowly, and paused for her to speak, then resumed — "and why should we not be

married quietly, instead of with all the parade and nonsense of a fashionable wedding." He caught his breath as she raised her eyes to his, half in acquiescence. "If you only knew what I am trying to save you from. . . ."

He bent and kissed her with fierce earnestness. Under the influence of this contact, she felt her resolution giving way; as his lips at length released her, he whispered, with a triumphant sense that the battle was won,—

"Darling, it is settled then; we shall be married as soon as I can see the clergyman." He spoke in a tone as if nothing remained to be discussed.

Overcome by the spell of his kiss, she rested, her eyes closed, and head leaning against the back of the couch, so still, that for a moment, he wondered if she had fainted. He bent closer to her.

"You hear me, pet?" he whispered, taking her hand. It was warm now, and the fingers closed on his.

"Yes, I hear. . . ."

She started as, at that moment, someone entered the room behind them. It was Uncle Tom.

"Kitty, don't be frightened, dear, but I'm come to fetch you. Your grandmother has fainted and been taken home. I thought I had better come to tell you at once."

De Montfort had started to his feet, something very like an oath strangled in his throat, as Tom came upon them. Controlling himself with difficulty, he said, handing her back her glove,—

"Allow me to take you to the carriage."

Tom fell naturally into the rear. Glancing to see that he was not listening, the duke bent, and whispered,—

"I have your promise, remember; let nothing tempt you to speak."

As he raised his head, he frowned; his eyes had encountered those of Malcolm who was coming towards him.

As the tall, soldierly figure came nearer, De Montfort again whispered,—

"Remember."

He had no time for more; Malcolm, a troubled look upon his fair, handsome face, his grave, blue eyes fixed upon Kitty, said, in a voice of forced calm, his brows contracting as if with pain, as he spoke,—

"I am sorry to trouble you, De Montfort,

but business requires that I should speak to you to-night." The duke bit his lip, and flashed an angry look upon him. "Shall I come to your hotel, or where will be most convenient?"

Malcolm spoke quietly, but his eyes were upon the face of the girl he worshipped. His heart beat faster as he saw, with quick intuition, that Kitty was unhappy. Looking at her with some concern,—

"I hope you are not disturbed over Mrs Van Eyck," he said to her kindly. "I have taken her home and she is recovered now. The doctor says there is no danger."

Kitty raised her lovely eyes to his, half-ashamed; she knew she had not been thinking of her grandmother, and her frank nature made her dislike a misconception, even of so slight a kind. Here the duke, inwardly raging at this interruption said, coldly,—

"I can spare you five minutes at my hotel in half-an-hour. Now, perhaps, you will permit us to take Miss Fauntleroy to her carriage."

Kitty, startled at the unkindness of his tone, raised her eyes again with a pitying expression to Malcolm's face. She had known them such

inseparable friends, and she was puzzled and pained at the estrangement which, ever since her arrival in New York, she had observed between them.

"Perhaps Miss Fauntleroy will allow me to come, too," Malcolm rejoined quietly, taking his place beside Uncle Tom and following the other two.

The duke walked on with Kitty in silence, inwardly raging at Malcolm, and cursing what he styled to himself the other's "damned impertinence."

Uncle Tom followed Kitty into the carriage, and De Montfort, as if to shut out Malcolm from her view, said his adieus standing, his shoulders filling the window. Kitty remembering something in Malcolm's expression which appealed to her and regretting De Montfort's brusque manner towards him, was wishing to say good-night to him, and felt quite glad when, on the opposite side of the carriage, he appeared to De Montfort's great disgust. She held out her hand to him; it was that which the duke had ungloved. Malcolm's blood coursed faster as her little warm palm touched his own, and he could not refrain from returning her frank grasp with a strong pressure.

Kitty, accustomed to think of him as "only Malcom," was not surprised, and smiled frankly in return for his "good-night."

De Montfort felt an unreasoning jealousy as he turned back into the house and the carriage drove away. Malcolm, lighting a cigar, walked off quickly up the avenue, a prey to bitter thoughts, which clouded his handsome, aristocratic face, and made him look older than his age. Kitty's face was before him; he thought of her as he had first seen her, in her pink frock and pretty ruffled sun-bonnet, heard, in fancy, her joyous laugh resounding through the old house, as, like the happy child she was, she tripped about attending to the needs of her sick father. He had adored her from the first, but from the first she had been forbidden to him, and thus he had been compelled to stand aside and let another win her—so he had thought—until the surprise of De Montfort's announcement of his own engagement to Bessie, made only on the morning of their departure, had, too late, left him free to win Kitty, if he could. Then had come this season in New York. When Malcolm, perceiving how the duke appropriated Kitty to himself, had ventured

to ask De Montfort, if he were still engaged to Bessie, the latter had met him with a cowardly negative, and Malcolm, his hopes crushed a second time, had again retired into the background.

Now, he knew that the duke had lied, and, worse still, had acted the dastardly part of winning Kitty's heart, perhaps, while by every tie he was in honour bound to Bessie. Knowing that a great catastrophe threatened Kitty, Malcolm walked feverishly onwards, longing, yet impotent, to avert the coming misery from her innocent head. Coming to the duke's hotel, he entered, and went into the empty reception room, telling a hall-boy to inform De Montfort that he awaited him there on the latter's return.

"He am a mighty fine-lookin' gen'leman. I done nebber see a man much handsomer," reflected the simple coloured man, watching the tall Englishman as he paced to and fro, twisting the ends of his long, fair moustache, which, now and then, he bit fiercely between his even, white teeth. "Golly, but he am ragin' up an' down like de debble. I sh'u'dn't wonder but he's come ter fight a duel wif der dooke," thought the same bell-man a quarter-of-an-

hour later, on looking in and finding Malcolm still striding to and fro, his footfalls drowned in the heavy pile of the velvet carpet.

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“Wyndham, nothing but a sense of duty would have compelled me to come here to-night.”

They were standing in De Montfort’s rooms, and the latter had demanded, with little courtesy, the other’s business.

“Well, don’t waste time over preliminaries. Pray say what you have come here to say,” was the surly answer.

De Montfort had thrown himself on to a lounge, and Malcolm remained standing near the fire.

“I had better tell you straight out that I have had a letter from Bessie.”

De Montfort’s face paled, and he started to his feet with a curse.

“Show it to me,” he commanded, extending his hand for the letter.

Malcolm drew back involuntarily, the other’s attitude was so threatening.

“Pardon me,” he said coldly. “But I am not in the habit of betraying trust reposed in me.” He looked proudly into the duke’s face, its features inflamed with sullen rage.

"—you! and — her!" was the response.

"I have come here to tell you that Bessie, naturally furious at the manner in which you have treated her, has ordered me to go to Kit—Miss Fauntleroy, and tell her everything. I have thought over the matter, and feel that, instead, you are the proper person to undertake such an explanation. Will you do it?"

"No!" thundered De Montfort, without pausing in his pacing up and down the room.

Then ensued a dead silence for some moments, during which the duke had time to reflect.

"Is that your final decision?" asked Malcolm, with difficulty controlling his voice, as he took up his hat to leave.

De Montfort strode on without answer. Malcolm walked the length of the room towards the door; as he was about to open it, De Montfort who had made up his mind that he must gain time or lose Kitty forever, called out,—

"I'll tell her myself; you needn't meddle further in what is no concern of yours."

CHAPTER XIV

JEALOUSY

Iago. O beware, my lord, of jealousy ;
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on . . .

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN Tom Barmore had turned Will Bell out of his house, the latter had ridden straight to the town and stopped at the post-office. Knocking loudly, with the butt of his whip on the low wooden door, Bell waited, amidst the lightly-falling snowflakes, through which the moon at intervals showed herself, white and mysterious. Bell thundered loudly on the door a second time, and stopped to listen. Presently a window was opened above.

“What’s the racket?” cried a voice, and a red head stuck itself through the aperture. A volley of oaths was all the response he got, and Bell’s horse began flinging the snow in all directions as he felt the cruel Mexican spur, “I’ll be down in a second,” shouted he at

the window, clapping it to to keep out the cold wind. He had recognised the oaths and the voice.

A few minutes later the door opened, the friends greeted one another, and, after seeing to the needs of the horse, entered, and shut themselves within the house.

“Whar’s the whusky?” Bell’s teeth chattered as he dashed the snow off his rough coat.

The red-headed one was piling the fire with fresh logs. This done, he rose, and put the whisky on the table.

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The friends had sat long into the night; the whisky was all drank, and before they threw themselves upon the single couch the house contained, the red-headed one had sworn an oath to help his friend, and to do in all things as the latter had directed him. Next morning he had seen Bell and his horse into the train, together with the traps, brought down before daybreak by old Jake. When they grasped hands for the last time as the train moved out of the little depot, making the steep mountain sides echo again with the clanging of its great bell, the red-headed one said,—

“You bet I’ll let yer know, and I’m just the first one to know about it, too.”

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“Sure he’s gone, father? You don’t think he’ll sneak back again?”

Assured by her father that she had nothing more to fear, a light of triumph broke over her beautiful face; she rose and came proudly towards Mr Barmore. Her breathing came short with excitement, her grey eyes flashed and appeared almost black, whilst every moment the rich colour of her cheeks became deeper, and her fingers worked convulsively,—“At last, at last!” was her joyful thought.

“Father, would you like to see me a duchess?”

“A what!” exclaimed plain Tom Barmore.

“Yes, a duchess.”

She was standing before him, now, in a bold attitude, her hands upon her handsome hips.

“Bessie, ain’t you clean cracked?”

“Father, I’ve been engaged to the duke ever since before he went to New York. It was him sent me those gloves; I only fooled you, when I told you it was Uncle Tom.”

Tom Barmore sat speechless before her, looking, open-mouthed, up into her triumphant

face. Suddenly a thought struck him; he had tipped back his chair till it balanced on two legs, now it came forward with a crash.

“Are you quite certain, Bessie, that the duke’s not been fooling you? What’s all this talk about him and Kitty?”

In a flash, Bessie’s face changed; her brows knit themselves into the blackness of a thunder-cloud, and all the triumph died away.

“I’d have fixed that long ago if I could have spoken, but I was afraid of Will Bell.” She glanced nervously through the window, the memory of his fingers on her throat, where the marks still showed, black and cruel, and the hiss of his words in her ears.

“By God! I’ll kill you first!”

That day Bessie let it be known everywhere that she was engaged to the duke. She arrayed herself in her prettiest gown, and, wearing a pair of the long, light-tinted gloves which De Montfort had sent her, sat down, her hands folded in her lap, to receive all her friends; these, on receipt of the news, came flocking, to see with their own eyes one upon whom Fate had bestowed so high a destiny. Bessie assumed a very languid air, such as in the story papers she had been in the habit

of devouring, had always been ascribed to heroines of the English aristocracy. She did not permit the presence of any of her riotous young brothers and sisters, and even good, plain, old Tom Barmore found it very difficult to comport himself according to her ideal of the future father-in-law of an English duke. His simple little wife chanced into the wood-house towards evening, when the reception was at its height; smelling a very strong odour of whisky-hot, she went quickly back to the kitchen to procure a light; returned, she held it aloft, and discovered her worthy old husband sitting astride some logs, and sheepishly wiping his lips with the back of one hand, whilst in the other he held the steaming glass.

“My gracious, Tom!” exclaimed his wife.

“Hist, wife! I’m kinder tired of sitting around in my store clothes sipping lemonade. Golly, Kitty,” he exclaimed with earnestness, giving his knee a tremendous slap with his disengaged hand, “I’m not so darned sure about dukes being the best kind of son-in-laws; ’pears to me Will Bell was a mighty good honest sort of a coon, after all, and, great Scott! couldn’t he swig down the whisky

straight! I don't know anyone 'bout here as could touch him at it, 'cept me, p'r'aps," he added, with visible pride, glancing at Mrs Kitty, who still, lamp in hand, stood meekly regarding him. The spirit had cheered the old man after the depressing effects of Bessie's grand reception and made him feel sociable.

"Put down that lamp and come here," he said, holding out a welcoming arm to Mrs Kitty. Pulling the little woman on to a seat on his knee, he made her take a considerable sip of his hot drink. "Don't be afraid, there's plenty more where that came from," he laughed, pointing her to where, at his side, stood a big pitcher of boiling water and the keg of whisky. "Now, don't you kinder think we're a heap more comfortable here, Miss Kitty?" Here he gave her a bear-like embrace and several resounding kisses. "Yes, indeed," he went on, taking a long breath, "a mighty darned heap more comfortable than those ones up there at the grand reception."

He opened his big coat and made Mrs Kitty cuddle inside close to his great, kind heart. She had been running around all day like a little frightened mouse, trying to carry out Bessie's multitudinous orders. Warmed by the

comfortable care of her husband, she nestled, like a child, against his breast, and, of all the people in the house that evening, those two were the most to be envied.

.

Later in the day, when Bessie's parlour became so close and warm from overcrowding that it was difficult to remain any length of time within in comfort, there arrived yet another guest. Grinning with a malicious leer at Bessie as she sat in state, he stood by the door, looking across the shoulders of those about him. He appeared much diverted by all he saw, nudging the men in his vicinity, and making remarks, far from complimentary, upon Bessie, the occasion, and the company generally. Scratching his red head, he presently turned to leave, muttering,—

“I guess my lady duchess will wish she'd laid low a while longer soon. *I* wouldn't be in her shoes, anyhow.”

He had not forgotten the cut she gave her horse out in the road before the post office that day the gloves came from New York.

CHAPTER XV

THE MORNING AFTER THE BALL

“At first, though mute, she listen’d, like a dream,
Seem’d all he said ; nor could her mind, whose beam
As yet was weak, penetrate half his scheme.
But when, at length, he uttered, ‘Thou art she !’
All flash’d at once, and, shrieking piteously,—
‘Oh, not for worlds !’ she cried.”

THOMAS MOORE.

ON the morning after the ball, Kitty awoke depressed and unrefreshed. For a girl but yesterday affianced, she showed little sign of happiness. Her first consciousness was of some evil impending, she knew not what. She lay half waking for some moments, dreamily disturbed, when suddenly, in a flash, came the thought of the duke, and what he had demanded of her. She was wide-awake now ; her blue eyes open, her heavy, red-gold hair tossed off her temples in feverish abandon ; sitting upright in her bed, she looked anxiously about her. It was nine o’clock ; she rang the bell for her maid.

“Are there no letters?” she asked, when Marie appeared bearing her tea.

“None, mademoiselle.”

At this moment, a footman called Marie, and gave her a note to take to her mistress.

Somehow, the sight of the coronet it bore upon its envelope brought a pained expression instead of a smile to Kitty's lips. She took it and tore it open, asking herself what had changed her—why did not her heart beat joyfully to-day as on other days at sight of the familiar writing? The note ran:—

“May I see you at eleven? I shall call at that hour. I trust Mrs Van Eyck is better.—Yours,
CHANDOS.”

He was coming, then; he must be in earnest in what he had said last night. Kitty looked wretchedly about the room; she thought of her father and Nan—if she might only tell them! Even tell Uncle Tom; his calm, handsome face, familiar as the other two, came before her. The others were absent; but he was here, at her elbow, her natural protector, to be appealed to on the eve of such a solemn decision as that, which, in two short

hours, she would be called upon to make. Remembering her father, Nan, her home, all the familiar faces and scenes from which she was being asked to part forever, the girl, overcome by the desolation of her position, suddenly threw herself down upon her pillows, and burst into a passion of tears.

Marie, fortunately, was absent, and Kitty had her cry out alone. Then, languid and ill at ease, she arose and went to her bath.

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Kitty came, with lagging step, to join De Montfort in the library. She found him, after his usual irritable fashion when under strong excitement, pacing to and fro. On hearing the door open, he came quickly towards her, and would have folded her in his arms; something, however, in Kitty's face caused him to pause; he, instead, took her little cold hands in his own, and looked anxiously at her as she stood before him, weary, trembling, pale, with downcast eyes.

"I am afraid you are ill, darling?" he said, anxiously. "Has the ball tired you like that?"

He was greatly concerned; he had never before seen her thus. His perceptions, though not of the most delicate, warned him of some

inexplicable change in her; the words he had come to say died on his lips before her.

“What has happened, dear? What is the matter?” he urged. “Come and sit near the fire; your hands are cold.”

Seating her, he stirred the coal into a blaze, and then knelt beside her and began chafing her hand. She had not smiled; her face bore an expression of distress very unusual to it. He bent and kissed her fingers; this seemed to give her courage to speak.

“I cannot do as you wish,” she said. “I cannot, I cannot.” Snatching her hand from him, she covered her face with it and burst into tears.

De Montfort, shocked and bewildered, did not know what to do; he remained kneeling where he was beside her. “Did she mean that she would not be his wife at all?”

“Kitty,” he commenced, when her sobs began to abate, “I cannot understand; what do you say, dear?”

“Oh, I cannot do it,” and the sobs burst out afresh, “I must tell dear old Dad.”

The duke bit his lip. If she told Dad, that would be an end of everything. He thought of Bessie, and had not the courage to face

the possibility of her carrying out the threats made in her last letter—and Malcolm, too! he had also to reckon with him. He felt that Kitty was right, and knew that, had she acted otherwise, she would not have been his Kitty. Still, he would persuade her to change her mind. She loved him. Knowing this, he supposed himself to be all-powerful with her.

“Kitty, dear little girl, you must allow me to judge for you in this matter,” he began, watching her pale face, with its eyes wearily closed, lying back upon the cushion of her chair. She did not move, so he went on, “It is only reasonable that I should wish to be married without all the fuss and show your grandmother would think indispensable.”

Kitty gave a deep sigh; she, child that she was, wondered whether, after all, to be married was not an evil rather than a good. She had always been so free, and now, at once, she felt restricted in her will to do what she was sure was right. She had heard of English wives being slaves; was she, then, perhaps, changing her freedom for slavery? She gave a little shudder at the thought. De Montfort saw, and went on hurriedly,—

“It is not as if you did not know that your grandmother approved. . . .”

Kitty opened her eyes and looked him straight in the face.

“I must, also, have my father’s approval,” she said, with quiet dignity.

De Montfort’s eyes turned aside; the innocent purity of her regard caused him to waver; he could not meet her look.

As he turned away his face, Kitty, no longer under the spell of his kisses, let her eyes rest upon him. Love was too new to her to have become a habit. His demands upon her irked her; love’s wings are like the butterfly, they are not made to stand the fret and tempest of everyday existence. One rough touch, and the glamour is destroyed; this is especially true in regard to an innocent, inexperienced girl. In her ignorance of life and its realities, she demands so much more of perfection than it is in the power of any man to give. Her love is spiritual—ideal. To awaken her roughly from her dreams, and, above all, to demonstrate to her that her idol is capable of anything less than perfection, that his feet are of clay, is to destroy at one blow her love for him. In later life, experi-

ence teaches a woman to expect little and endure much ; but this wisdom is denied love in its first blush ; it gives and exacts all.

Kitty's eyes, resting on De Montfort's face, felt a sense of strangeness ; could he be changed ? she wondered, half unconsciously. How was it that, until now, she had never seen that hard expression in his stone-blue eyes, the obstinate lines which his heavy black moustache left unconcealed about his mouth ? She divined rather than observed these things ; their impression chilled her, leaving her powerless to analyse its cause.

There had been silence for some moments ; De Montfort was lost in disagreeable reflection. He rose to his feet, and began poking the fire furiously.

“I really cannot understand you, Kitty.”

He had turned towards her, his brow dark with sullen anger, and the poker still in his hand.

“Mr de Montfort !” exclaimed Kitty, surprised at the vehemence of his tone, and regarding him half in terror.

For a moment, on hearing her address him by the familiar name, he felt inclined to laugh, then the remembrance of what he considered her “confounded obstinacy” made his blood

boil again. She could not be in real earnest, he reflected; and yet, her fooling would certainly cost them their happiness. The memory of Bessie's threats came to him, and with it the certainty of disgrace and loss of Kitty's love. A muttered curse on the obstinacy of all womankind escaped him before he knew it, and he turned and began ill-treating the fire again, in the endeavour to cover his confusion at its having escaped him in her presence.

Kitty, now thoroughly frightened, rose and was about to leave the room.

"No, you will not," he cried, seizing her wrist with a force which hurt her. "Kitty, how can you *pretend* to love me, and yet behave like this?"

She stood before him trembling; could this be the lover of yesterday? Something in her terrified eyes made him half divine her thoughts. Relinquishing the fierceness of his grasp, and trying to soften the tones of his voice, he said,—

"Forgive me, Kitty, dearest, you can't tell how your refusal has maddened me. I thought I could have persuaded you to do as I wished immediately; instead—"

His anger flashed out again at the remembrance of how short was the time allotted to him by Fate before the dreaded bolt of Bessie's vengeance should fall upon him. Kitty shivered as she saw the fury in his eyes, and made a slight movement to release herself from his angry grasp.

"I am afraid I can never marry you *now*," she said tearfully. "I could not; I should be afraid," she added, like a child.

Malcolm, who had just been entering the library, having come to inquire after Mrs Van Eyck's health, heard her words. A great screen near the door hid him from view, and he was about to leave the room again when the duke's next words arrested him involuntarily.

"Kitty, you are my promised wife; nothing can alter that now. As a wife, remember you are bound to obey me. . . ."

"I cannot," cried Kitty, bursting into tears.

"You shall, by G—d, you shall!" all the fury of his baulked passion in his voice.

Malcolm, unable to stand more, came forward into the room. He silently eyed De Montfort, and then looked from him to the little figure weeping on the sofa cushions. A

look of bitter menace passed between the two men.

“I am afraid, Miss Fauntleroy, the ball last night and your grandmother’s illness have been too much for you?” he said, in a tone of inquiry, as he advanced and stood beside her, ignoring absolutely the presence of the duke.

De Montfort, seeing that Malcolm was determined to remain, and, fearing the consequences should he trust himself to speak, without another word strode from the room.

“Kitty, dear, tell me what it is that ails you?”

Malcolm had always called her Kitty at home, but naturally, recently, meeting her chiefly in society, he had relapsed into the more formal mode of address. Now, the familiar name, spoken in Malcolm’s kindly voice, in tones of the tenderest solicitude for her, appealed forcibly to her bruised sensibilities. She timidly put forth her cold little hand towards him where he stood beside her, her face still buried in the cushions; he took the hand in both his own, and sat down near her on the couch without speaking. He was thinking of Bessie’s letter, and wondered

whether De Montfort had kept his promise. Silence is often more eloquent than many words; Kitty felt this now. Malcolm's comforting presence soothed her gradually into calm. Gently he chafed the little hand between his own, until the rose tints of its finger tips returned, and its whiteness regained its former delicate beauty. Kitty's sobs ceased, and she presently raised her head.

"That's right," said Malcolm pleasantly, pulling hard at his long moustache. "Now you're all right again."

Kitty smiled from under her long wet lashes. She wondered why it was she had never noticed before what a kind good face Malcolm had. Too delicate to allude to the cause of her unhappiness, he strove to make her forget it by talking of the ball and other society functions in which they were mutually interested, and finally, thinking that his efforts in this direction were little better than a flat failure, Kitty's sympathies appearing to be elsewhere, he commenced a ridiculous story of how a camel had run away with him into the desert somewhere near the Pyramids, when he was last in Egypt. He had succeeded in making her break into a hearty laugh when

Uncle Tom, who had slept late after the ball, joined them.

“I think I shall go and see how my grandmother is,” said Kitty, rising, glad to make her escape.

.

Kitty went to Mrs Van Eyck's door, and was told that the doctor had forbidden anyone to see his patient. This caused her much relief, as she dreaded being questioned regarding the duke. She turned to her own room, and locking herself in there, sat down to try to analyse what were her real feelings towards De Montfort.

The evening he had told her of his love seemed so far away now; could it be that it had all happened only yesterday? His character, viewed in the light of the developments of this morning, had taken on a sinister colouring of which before she had never suspected the possibility. When she had first known him, she had thought him quite old, his thirty-six years, appearing to her childish ideas much the same as those of her father. Since she had gained a larger experience of the world, she had lost this feeling; now, trying to view him in the light of her future

husband, it returned upon her with redoubled force. When he had spoken, and looked so furiously at her this morning, she had become aware for the first time that his hair was whitening at the temples. His eyes, too, last evening so full of love's fire, had looked upon her, to-day, when she finally refused to obey him with a cold stare, hard almost to hatred.

Why had she ever promised to be his wife at all? Was it not because *he* wished it so earnestly? She had mistaken pity for love, and having persuaded herself that she loved him, had forthwith invested him with God-like attributes. Here, far from her home, in the midst of strange faces, she had naturally clung to his familiar one; all these weeks he had shown her the deepest devotion, and her grandmother had never ceased singing his praises. She took but little real interest in society, and had found him a refuge from dulness—a confidant who, knowing her people, could be supposed to be sincere in the interest he showed in hearing of them, and in the affection he protested for them. His handsome face and person, his polished manners and highly-educated mind, all had tended to

fascinate her ; even all unconsciously to herself, his title and great wealth had helped to throw a glamour about him.

Girls think romantically of love and crusts in a cottage, not knowing how great is love's disgust when he comes to the point of existing on the said dry sustenance, and that never was there a truer adage than that which tells of his horrified flight by the window upon his viewing the entry of poverty by the door. Kitty was too simple and natural to have any of these ideas ; her plain, country bringing-up had left her mind as fresh as the field flowers amongst which she had grown to girlhood, and in it was no room for maukish sentimentality.

She tortured her tired brain with speculation for nearly an hour, sitting there before her fire. Gradually her thoughts reverted to her father, to Nan, to her home, to the old fresh life she loved so well ; tears stole quietly down her cheeks and fell upon her little hands loosely crossed in her lap. She did not stir. The clock ticked on, with slow, even beats, producing a sense of soothing companionship ; the wood-ash fell lightly to the ground, leaving a glowing cave in the fire's

midst. Kitty's eyes closed; her head sunk sideways upon the cushion of her chair—she was asleep.

.

De Montfort cursed himself as he left Kitty's presence. He knew that he had played his cards badly; by losing control of his temper he had wrecked all. Malcolm, too, he hated; what affair was it of his, how dare he interfere in the matter at all? The duke remembered his promise to Malcolm regarding Bessie, and a horrible fear suddenly possessed him that the former would think it his duty to enlighten Kitty himself. If Malcolm should do so now, before he could see her again, then his last hope of influencing her would be lost; the thought added to his anger against his old friend. Arrived at his hotel, he told his servant to order his horse; he thought some hard exercise might help to calm his mind and enable him to think out in what way he could best meet the present emergency.

.

Kitty awoke, refreshed and calm in mind. She determined to devote herself to caring for her sick grandmother's comfort, and to endure with patience all that the old lady

should say regarding the duke. As to the latter, Kitty had decided to tell him that it was no use their being engaged, as she felt that she did not love him well enough to marry him. Most men reserve till after marriage the exhibition of themselves in their true colours; De Montfort, however, had made the mistake of feeling too secure of Kitty's love, and so, angered at her resistance of his will, had, in losing command of his temper, permitted her to see beneath the surface; the discovery of his domineering disposition—one so common amongst Englishmen towards their wives—had been a revelation to the free American girl.

The luncheon gong sounded and she went downstairs, where she found Uncle Tom and Lord Inverness waiting for her.

Malcolm's expression changed from anxiety to relief as he saw Kitty enter the room; he had expected to find her worried and distressed, and, instead, she appeared with all her old-time gladness. The sight of them both made her happier still. She went up to good old Uncle Tom, and kissing him, then passed her hand through Malcolm's arm, saying,—

“Come along into lunch,”—and smiling back at Uncle Tom, led the way from the library, where she had found them, to the dining-room.

.

Meanwhile the duke had become tired of galloping in the snow, and horse and rider, alike wearied with hard exercise, turned towards home. The snow had driven everyone from the Park, and he was alone, except for, now and again, the presence of a mounted policeman.

“I’ll see her again this afternoon,” he thought, in no wise moved from his resolution to bend Kitty’s will to his own.

In the pauses in his two hours’ ride, he had thought over all sorts of projects, become more and more determined to marry Kitty at once; he had even dim ideas of carrying her off, and making her his wife against her will, as his great-grandfather had done with his great-grandmother, when they had posted all the way to Gretna Green, flying from a pair of enraged fathers and guardians; it had been a desperate venture, and the former duke had only saved the day by turning and shooting dead the horses of the following carriage when it had arrived at too close quarters to

be pleasant. Thinking of this story of his ancestors, De Montfort worked himself into an even more unreasonable state of mind than before; he told himself that Kitty loved him, and persuaded himself that nothing but absurd scruples prevented her from acquiescing in his plans.

“I’ll see her this afternoon again,” he thought; “she shall consent this time.”

CHAPTER XVI

MURDER

“Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd,
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head;
Oh, horrible ! oh, horrible ! most horrible !”

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN the red-headed one found himself standing in the cold freshness of the winter's night, after his visit to Bessie's grand reception, he gave a wild war-whoop, and threw his fur cap into the air, catching it easily again by the clear light of the moon, smiling in calm majesty above him.

“This news will raise Will's hair,” he said aloud, starting down the hill at a quick pace towards the town.

.

“Bessie engaged to the duke, Nan ? What do you mean ?”

Mr Fauntleroy looked up, surprised, as his sister, full of her great news, came and stood beside him.

“It’s true, George, true as shucking corn. Mary’s in the kitchen now; she says Bessie’s been promised to him all along, but she was afraid to tell it because of Will Bell. Now he’s gone and it’s all come out. She had a grand reception yesterday, and Mary says she and Jake and Dinah, and sister Kitty too, are all tired waiting on the folks, there was so many of them came, and Bessie, all dressed out in her best, and a pair of those long elegant gloves on, and it wasn’t Tom sent them, but the duke himself; gracious, bless my soul, George, fancy me the aunt of a duchess!”

Nan, purple from want of breath and excitement combined, sunk on to a settle near the wall, and stared round-eyed at her brother.

Mr Fauntleroy gently smiled, turning an indulgent and affectionate glance upon her.

.

“My! Mrs Kitty, do you suppose we’ll be called upon to stand on our company manners every day right along, till we’re made mother and father of a duke and duchess? It’s a darned sight worse nor wearing store

clothes and starting out to get married oneself," said old Tom, lugubriously staring into the roaring log fire out in the wash-house, by the side of which Mrs Kitty was preparing to boil the family linen.

This was two days after the announcement of the engagement; Bessie had kept the house in gala state ever since, and Mrs Kitty found her old man, driven from his comfortable corner beside the parlour fire, had taken to following her about "like a tame woodchuck," as she told him, laughing and trying to cheer him up again.

Bessie, meanwhile, had worn out four of the dozen pairs of gloves shaking hands with everybody. She thought proper to lay aside all the duties she had formerly fulfilled in the household, and the children, relieved from her somewhat arbitrary sway, rushed about the place doing as they liked, and driving Mrs Kitty, her old man, and good, plain Mary nearly distracted. Bessie had found in cheap novels that the duchesses therein depicted always rose very late in the day. She took to lying in bed in the morning, therefore, and Mary was compelled, besides doing all her own and Bessie's work, to carry up a sub-

stantial breakfast for Bessie, and stay waiting upon her half the morning, whilst Mrs Kitty struggled with the children below stairs.

“Mary, I wonder you dare come into my presence with that great flap hat tied down over your ears,” exclaimed Bessie, angrily, looking down the telescope of Mary’s immense hat at the kind, red face peering, bewildered, at her from within.

“It was very cold milking this morning, Miss Bessie, and—”

“Call me ‘Your Highness,’ please,” said Bessie, with hauteur.

“Your Highness,” corrected Mary, meekly.

She had always stood in some awe of Bessie’s tongue, and now “she was beyond bearing,” as the poor, faithful creature had told old Dinah that morning. Bessie had always heard that duchesses were haughty, and so she felt it her duty to be very haughty indeed, and her favourite mode of giving expression to it was by treading upon the faithful old friend of all her lifetime.

“Here, put down that tray, and bring me my writing things. Go and get some more ink from the parlour.”

Mary nervously precipitated the tray with a crash on the uncovered table.

“Dear me, my nerves!” Duchesses also had nerves, Bessie remembered. “What a fool you are, Mary, to shock me like that. Go right along and get the ink. You can come back before dinner and fetch my tray away, and take my letters to father. Go and tell him he’s got to go to the post-office himself this afternoon because they’re very important.”

Mary ducked a two-days’-ago learnt curtsey towards the bed, her great hat making a dive forward at Bessie like some huge bird about to peck her, and was turning to leave the room.

“Didn’t I tell you, Mary, you are not to turn your back to me?”

Mary jerked round instantly, and began, with difficulty, waddling backwards towards the door, her eyes fixed with an agonised childlike expression upon her tormentor, her two large red thumbs turning outwards, horn-like, from the sides of her extended apron, which she held in the attitude of one taking an old-fashioned dancing lesson.

“Stop! Throw a log on the fire first.”

All Mary's efforts were to do over again; she felt as if she must cry out right under the hard stare of Bessie's great green-grey eyes, fixed mercilessly upon her as she again began the process of backing out of her presence.

"Now, I'm going to have my dues," exclaimed Bessie, arranging the writing-paper beside her, and munching loudly a bit of poor Mary's crisp toast with her strong white teeth. "Kitty shall see if she can euchre me out of a ducal coronet," she said aloud to her self.

.

Will Bell journeyed onwards, drinking to excess and swearing vengeance against Bessie, who by her fickleness had ruined his life. He kept himself in a state of semi-drunkenness, but his mind was not so obscured that he could not recall the bright hopes with which, on his up journey into the mountains, he had stopped at the towns along the way, calling upon those he met, or knew in each, to drink luck and Bessie's health. He said he was going home to be married, and bring back his bride after a three years' absence. Now it angered him to be asked what ailed him, and where was his promised wife. However,

his aspect became so dangerous, as he drank deeper and travelled farther, that at last none but a fool would have ventured to mix himself up in his concerns at all.

Going into the post-office in a town on the borders of two States one morning, he demanded if there were any letters or telegrams for him.

“Here’s a telegram’s been waiting several days,” replied the keeper of the office, handing him the coloured envelope.

Bell, with trembling fingers, tore it open. At first his soddened brain could not take in its sense, the paper cracked as he tried to hold it straight before his eyes.

“—— me, if I can read it!” he cursed, trying to steady himself on his legs, and going to the dusty little window of the office to get more light upon the paper.

“Bessie’s given out she’s been engaged to the duke all along. Didn’t dare speak when you were here.”

Bell frowned savagely. He was sober now. Crashing his fist on to the window-sill, he shouted,—

“Engaged to the duke is she . . . ?” She’ll *never* marry him, though!” and with a string of curses he left the post-office, crossed the street, and flung into the depôt.

.

Amongst other things, Tom Barmore found himself called upon to endure was to foot the bills for dresses, linen, shoes, hats—everything, in fact, which Bessie thought proper to order for her trousseau. Never rich at the best of times, Tom grumbled roundly at having to make so much expenditure, even if it were for the glory of a ducal wedding. Mrs Kitty, more than ever like a frightened mouse as she scuttled to and fro trying to make the house run on Bessie’s new notions of what was fitting under the circumstances, drew her old checked shawl about her, and stared at her old man in desperation very often about this time. The children had gotten quite beyond her, and naturally, also, good easy-going Mary could do nothing with them. Tom Barmore drank more than usual, sitting continually in the wood-house, and as he also smoked incessantly, poor Mrs Kitty lived in hourly terror of having the old homestead burnt about her ears. He was sitting

thus, as usual, one afternoon, when Mary, treading timidly, appeared.

“Her Highness . . .” she began, and then stopped dead, alarmed at the lurid light in old Tom’s eye. He took the pipe out of his mouth and waited, dangerously calm. Mary’s red face flushed purple in the recesses of her great hat, as she mustered up courage to go on again, “she says you’re to hitch up and be . . .”

“—— !” roared Tom, “you get back and tell her to hitch up herself, and go to ——. I’m mighty darned sure I’m not going on any more of them fool expeditions, where *she* does all the buyin’ and I do all the payin’. No, ——, I won’t!” he added sturdily, putting back his pipe in his mouth and gazing meditatively at the whisky keg by his side.

When Mary had stated her case to Bessie, the latter ordered her to tell Jake to bring round the buggy, and said she would drive herself down to the dressmaker’s beyond the town.

Half-an-hour later, old Tom heard the departure, and, from his seat of vantage, could see Bessie driving the ancient white horse down the yard,

"She'll break her neck if she goes that pace," he grumbled. "I'll have Jake drive her after this."

Here he took another pull at the whisky, and, settling himself well back on his seat, crossed his arms and began to smoke steadily. Five minutes later, he was surprised to see old Jake leading the white horse towards him, the buggy being empty.

"Where's Miss Bessie?" cried Tom, rising to his feet, and making his unsteady exit from the wood-house.

"She's done gone on ter de town a foot, fo' ders somethin' the matter ter de mare's hind limb. . . ."

"She'd break the hind limb of a camel," roared Tom, furious at hearing what had happened. "Unhitch the buggy right here, Jake, and let me see what's the matter with the beast."

.

Bessie's spirits rose as she walked on down the mountain, in the still winter air. The day was cloudless, and the sun's rays gleamed upon the dry snow, crunching with its musical sound beneath her feet. The few evergreens stood out black against the universal white-

ness, and the tall skeletons of the leafless trees were covered in a delicate frosting which outlined every little twig and spray, making a fairy scene; here and there down the mountain sides she passed a frozen waterfall, turned to ice as it fell. Walking briskly, Bessie soon entered the little town.

"There comes my lady duchess!" thought the red-headed one, looking at her passing from the high stool on which he sat sorting the newly-arrived letters. Bessie walked on a few steps, then, turning, came into the office and asked for her mail.

"There's nothing for you to-day, Bessie," answered the red-headed one with an impudent leer. Bessie did not condescend to notice him further, and with a toss of her head left the office and walked on to the dressmaker's. "My, you can shake your head all you like, your magnificent majesty," chuckled the red-headed one, "but I guess you'll get a mighty big surprise before long."

.

Walking through the town, Bessie met first one and then another of her old associates. Instead of stopping and gossiping with them, as was her wont from childhood, she con-

tented herself with a dignified inclination of her head and passed on, her friends looking after her, some in surprise, some in mirth. She was not able to bow with much grace, as this was her first essay; still she felt it incumbent on her "Not to be seen talking to common people any more," and walked on alone, finding it somewhat dull not to stop and glean all the news of everybody as usual. However, she reflected that her friends, the dressmakers, would be able to supply the deficit, and walked on, well-pleased with herself.

She stopped at a house, standing back in its yard, and surrounded by tall trees. Here lived the family of the Southern colonel, ruined by the war, and glad to do any kind of sewing to bring a few extra dollars to the meagre family purse, and who had helped Aunt Nan with Kitty's famous ball dress. Bessie entered the little white wooden gate and walked with slow dignity up the yard. The Maclaren girls had learnt now not to rush out of the front door, tumble down the porch steps, and throw themselves upon Bessie's neck with many warm girlish kisses and hearty salutations as had always been their wont; on the contrary, Bessie had soon taught them that, with some

people, elevation of position meant the discarding of all less distinguished friends, and that the faithful attachment of a lifetime must go to the wall, should the person professing it be poor.

.

Bessie stayed long at the dressmaker's, and it was getting dusk when she came quickly down the yard and passed out into the road ; it would be quite dark before she reached home, and there was no moon. She walked fast into the town, which was not very distant from the Maclarens, and on through it, up the principal street. She wished that she had the buggy, and regretted her reckless driving, which had lamed the old white horse. She hastened her steps as she got beyond the town, as she felt a little afraid of the Italians who were working on the great new hotel up on the hill. She left the last gas-lamp behind her, and passed out into the country. She had walked on a few paces when the tall figure of a powerful man, who had been leaning behind a tree whence he could by the light of the lamp opposite, observe anyone coming from the town, left his hiding-place, and began stealthily following her in the distance, skirting behind the shrubs which grew at the

side of the mountain road. Bessie could not see him as it had grown quite dark, and the last lamp had been passed. The road became very lonely hereabouts, as there would be no more houses until her own home was reached. The girl began to regret her false pride, which had prevented her from speaking to her old friends, otherwise she would have surely had an escort home. Had she accepted the cordial invitation to stay to supper of the Maclarens, she would, later in the evening, have had as many escorts as she could desire, the whole family of young people and their friends would have joyfully turned out in true Southern fashion, and, singing and laughing, have accompanied her through the dark woods to her home, and have there finished the evening with a dance.

Bessie walked on up the mountain, dogged in every step by the man behind her. At length she came to a place where an unfrequented track joined the main road. While they were nearing this, the man, instead of following her, had stolen quickly ahead, and just as the girl reached the spot, she felt herself seized from behind, and, notwithstanding her strong resistance and her cries, dragged forcibly away from the road, and down into a sort of wild ravine.

She heard the excited panting of the man's breath, and grew cold with terror. He never spoke a word. Her flesh ached from his iron grip, and she felt her senses leaving her. No help—the lonely woods resounded with her screams, the wild creatures rushed scared to their lairs, and the sleeping birds, startled, aroused to listen—still no help. Then silence. The man had placed an overmastering hand upon her mouth—she was choking.

“Now do you know me?” hissed a voice close to her ear. She could feel his hot breath scorching on her cheek, the hand pressed heavily upon her face, and she thought her neck must break. “I guess you know me now.” He ground his teeth as he said it, raising his voice from a whisper to a mutter.

Her heart died within her. She was utterly lost; she recognised the speech of Will Bell.

Ten seconds passed; his maddened, drink-sodden brain was trying to pierce the clouds of confusion in which, ever since she had seen him last, he had kept it steeped. Suddenly an access of drunken fury seized him. Springing to his feet, he drew his revolver and begun firing at the body of the fallen girl where he could feel her, in the darkness, at his feet,

lying bruised, torn, hatless, almost naked. Her screams recommenced, the second shot hit her. Her brain was clear again. She guessed from his incoherent roars that he was mad drunk, and thought if she could only roll in the darkness under a dense undergrowth, which the pistol's flash revealed, she might even yet escape his blind fury. He had fired three shots, when the fourth, with a sharp click, missed fire; the sound distracted the madman from his purpose, he paused and commenced stupidly fumbling with the trigger in the dark. Bessie began to crawl, dragging her wounded body down through the yielding snow. Would he miss her, and begin firing again before she could reach the shelter? With horror she saw that her woollen skirt was alight, swealing redly where the revolver muzzle had been held against it; in a moment he would see it, and all would be over. Another instant and her pain-stiffened fingers had seized and dashed the fire into the snow, grinding it with desperation against the ground. She had lost several seconds. She heard him curse the revolver, and, the fire out, crawled on towards her goal. He seemed to have for-

gotten her; his fury was turned upon the pistol and he began shaking it violently. Suddenly there was a flash and a loud, hoarse cry, Bessie, arrested in her agonised course, heard him fall heavily to the ground.

For a time all was silent; Bell was unconscious. Bessie, unable to move farther, lay still; her body freezing with cold, her mind frozen with terror. She was no longer able to cry out; a dull numbness possessed her. She lay straining her vision through the darkness at the black mass dimly outlined against the whiteness of the snow. The clouds had parted, revealing the stars, brilliant in the blue-blackness of the winter's night; the moon had not yet risen, and the air was so still that you could imagine all Nature sleeping the death sleep.

Suddenly Bell gave a deep groan. Bessie, startled back to consciousness, tried to raise herself upon her elbow, but fell helpless; she had been shot through the body and was slowly bleeding internally. The man near her gave another groan. It was horrible. Was he coming to, and would the frightful battle be all to do again? Bessie grew fainter at the thought, and closed her eyes, waiting for the worst. A volley

of curses, emitted in a changed, strangling voice, as Bell shifted his position, and tried to hold up his head. He had had a bullet pass up through his throat and enter the side of his skull, blowing away a part of it and losing him much blood, which had relieved the pressure on his brain and made him sober. A horrible sense of exhaustion overpowered him. Raising his hand to his wounded throat, he strove to hold it together, at the same time trying to rise and go for aid. Bessie shuddered as she watched him totter to his feet, make a few unsteady paces, and then, faint almost to death, fall helpless across her own body.

Crushed by the weight of his powerful form, she lay pinned to the earth. The strain was intolerable. Must she die like this, unable to summon aid? With one last desperate effort she raised her voice, crying, "Father." The still woods gave back the echo "Father," and again the distant hills repeated "Father," but no help came. Bessie, loathing the horrible burden of the dying man, half-raised herself, and strove to push him from her. Useless—the effort cost her her last remaining strength—she fell back, dying.

.

A man, mounted on an old black mule, made his way through the yard of Tom Barmore's house, came up to the porch, and, tying his beast to a tree near by, shouted to old Jake at the kitchen entrance to have an eye to the beast; then, entering the house, familiar to him as his own from childhood, he made his way into the warm parlour.

"Where's Bessie?" he asked. "Sister Lu sent her this note to ask her about how to fix some of her falderalls."

"But Bessie's stayed supper at your house, Ben. What do you mean?" said Mrs Kitty.

"She's never stayed down to our house," answered Ben, briskly. "Why, I saw her myself go down our yard at half-past four."

Here old Tom Barmore shifted his feet before the fire, and, taking his pipe out of his mouth, growled out,—

"Likely she's stopped down to the town to spend the evening with some of the young 'uns. 'Tain't late yet, and I'll bet we'll hear a whole harvestin' of them come up the yard soon."

Putting the pipe back between his lips, he puffed several heavy whiffs, making up for lost time, and threw another log on the fire.

"Won't you just stay, Ben, and smoke a

while till she comes in?" invited Mrs Kitty, quietly.

"With all the pleasure in life," Ben answered, and proceeded to settle himself down beside old Tom.

"How does your roof stand the snow this winter? Leak any?"

Old Tom turned sociably towards the younger man, and soon they were deep in discussing the results of the presidential election, having exhausted the question of house-building. After a time, Mrs Kitty, drawing her shawl about her, and holding in her hand the stocking she was knitting, called her young ones about her, and went to see them to bed. Ten o'clock passed, and it was nearing eleven. Mrs Kitty re-entered the room and took her seat on a low stool beside her husband.

"Bessie's staying pretty late," he remarked, looking up at the clock, ticking hoarsely above the mantel.

"I guess she's down to Hymes!" suggested Mrs Kitty.

"I don't believe that's so," said Ben, oracularly, "for their girls are over to our house to-night."

Silence fell for some time, Kitty knitting

busily, and the two men smoking and sipping their whisky.

"I must say Bessie's stayin' late," grumbled old Tom, stifling a yawn to keep his pipe between his teeth. "You better get to bed, Kitty, and I'll wait up for her."

"I guess I must be getting," said Ben, rising, "or our house 'll be closed, too." He had gotten to his feet, and was looking around for his hat and coat, when he turned to the others, and said, "Say, did you know Will Bell's back? He came into town this morning by the express. . . ." He stopped short, looking hard at Bessie's father and mother.

"Darn my skin!" exclaimed the old man, glancing fearfully at Mrs Kitty's whitening face, "are you—sure of that, Ben?"

"Why, course I am," responded Ben, decidedly. "I saw him fighting, drunk, outside the post-office about three o'clock." Here he started forward to aid Mrs Kitty who was almost fainting.

"Tom! Tom!" she gasped, "go quickly he's done it. Oh, go quickly!" she screamed, seeing Tom's look of being utterly nonplussed. "Ben!" she cried, turning to the other, "Will Bell threatened to murder Bessie. For God's

sake, fly back to the town and raise the alarm. He's done it! he's done it! It's past midnight, and the child not home! Oh, run, run, in the name of God! in the name of God!" wailed the poor mother, wringing her thin hands in agonised pleading.

Ben had seized hat and coat, rushed from the house, and was shouting to Jake for his mule; Mrs Kitty had followed him, her shawl forgotten, out into the yard, where she stood, bareheaded, beneath the stars. Tom Barmore, whose several whiskies had made him unable at first to grasp the thought which like lightning had flashed upon his wife, now came running from the house with Mrs Kitty's shawl and his own big coat.

"Come in out of there, Kitty, my dear," he called, coming up to the party in the yard. "Jake," he shouted, "saddle the mules, both on 'em, and be ready quick to come down ter th' town. Now you," he said, wrapping first her shawl, and then his big coat round the frail form of Mrs Kitty, "you just come right in. I want to see you comfortable by the fire first, and then I'll go on after Ben ter th' town.'

Poor, fragile Mrs Kitty let him take her where

he would, and catching her up in his strong arms, he got her quickly back into the house, where he called white Mary from her bed to come and tend her.

Five minutes afterwards he and Jake were galloping after Ben Maclaren.

.

It was past three o'clock; the moon had risen two hours before and flooded the snow-covered country with light. Until now, the search had been futile. They had discovered from the red-headed one that Will Bell had left the post-office about half-past three and had not returned. No one had seen Bessie except a coloured man, soon after she left the Maclaren's on the other side of the town. This led to much time being lost following up the tracks in the snow in that direction.

"Has anyone searched the old track to the stone pits?" shouted Ben, who had constituted himself one of the leaders.

No one had, and the search commenced in that direction. Poor, old, affectionate Tom Barmore, heartbroken with grief, kept close to Ben; he felt almost useless by himself.

The party neared the place where the road

joined the stone pit track. Suddenly someone gave a shout.

“What is it, Ben?” pitifully pleaded poor old Tom, clutching at the other’s arm.

“Is it . . . have they . . . ? My God ! Ben, they’ve found her !”

CHAPTER XVII

“I AM FREE!”

“And what is friendship but a name,
A charm that lulls to sleep;
A shade that follows wealth or fame,
And leaves the wretch to weep?”

OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

UNCLE TOM and Kitty were just commencing breakfast when Malcolm's card, with “May I join you?” scribbled on it, in pencil, was brought in. A few moments later he entered the room. Instead of his usual gay-hearted smile his face wore a grave and pained expression. Kitty's sympathy, always quick to divine distress in others, at once felt the change in him.

“What is the matter?” she asked anxiously.

For answer, Lord Inverness sunk into an easy-chair which stood near Kitty's side, and covered his face with his hands. Uncle Tom rose quickly from the table, and passing the sideboard, stopped to pour out a glass of sherry, and brought it to the stricken man.

“Ho'd on, old man ; what's up now ?” said Tom, affectionately, coming to Malcolm's side. “Drink this,” he continued, urging the wine upon his friend.

“Malcolm,” whispered Kitty, gently laying a timid hand upon his shoulders. She, too, had arisen, and stood, looking down upon him, with tear-filled, pitying eyes.

For answer, Malcolm, without uncovering his face, extended his other hand, and opening it, showed a crumpled cablegram in its palm. Uncle Tom took it and read:—

“The Duke of Airlie's yacht sunk in a squall, and all on board lost. Come home at once.
CAMPBELL.”

“Forgive me, Kitty,” said Malcolm, in a broken voice, as he rose and tried to control himself, “I ought to apologise for intruding my troubles upon my friends, but it seemed so natural to come to you and Tom at once,” the poor boy went on as he turned away to wipe his eyes upon the little lace-frilled handkerchief, which Kitty, with infinite tact, unobserved by himself, had slipped into his hand. Then he took a turn up and down the long room, and

becoming calmer, came again to the other two—he had unconsciously slipped the little handkerchief into his pocket.

"Will you see if there's a boat for me to-day, Tom?" he asked, then, turning, he took Kitty's hand in both of his, and looked hungrily into her sweet, upturned face. The thought had come to him that he was about to leave her here alone, unprotected from the man who had once been nearer to him than a brother, and whom he now considered as something very like a scoundrel. Looking into her sweet, blue eyes, he wondered whether he had better warn her of the contents of Bessie's letter; fear of paining Kitty had kept him undecided as to what to do. He had hoped to influence De Montfort to leave her in peace, whilst there was yet time, and now, all his arguments with the latter having failed, he felt it impossible thus to go away, and leave Kitty's destiny to a most cruel chance.

"Kitty—" he began, and was about to ask her to grant him a moment's interview alone, when the door opened and a footman brought in a telegram and presented it to Tom.

"Oh, what is it, Uncle Tom?" cried Kitty, running up to him, fearful of bad news of her

father. "Open it quick! Here, let me!" she cried impulsively, seizing the envelope out of Tom's clumsy fingers, and tearing it almost in halves in her anxiety to see its contents.

"What! Oh! Oh!"

Malcolm rushed forward and caught her just as she seemed about to fall.

The telegram read thus:—

"Bessie dead. Come home. Brother George sick.
SISTER NAN."

The blood surged and beat like hammers in Malcolm's temples as he felt Kitty's slender body reel against his side, for a moment passion blinded him, then, upbraiding himself for his selfishness, he tried to think only of her grief. He had led the half-fainting girl to a sofa, and he and Tom were doing their best to comfort her, when suddenly the thought flashed by him, piercing his heart like a dagger—Bessie dead! No further obstacle remained to the duke's project of winning and marrying this girl, whom he himself adored, and whom, to-morrow, he must leave for many weeks, if not for months.

.

"I shall certainly let the duke know you are going, Kitty—"

"Oh please, ma'am, don't!" cried the girl, anxiously.

"And why, pray?" inquired Mrs Van Eyck, coldly. "Bring me my writing materials," said she, turning to her maid.

Ten minutes later De Montfort received her note. He had just breakfasted, and was standing in the hotel corridor, debating whether or no it was too early to call upon Kitty. He had eaten his breakfast in gloomy self-absorption, thinking only of Kitty, and cursing her obstinate resistance of his will. Now, taking up his letters and morning papers unopened, he had just lighted a cigar, and was going towards the smoking-room when Mrs Van Eyck's note was handed to him. Before he had time to open it, a Union Club man stepped up to him with an open *Herald* in his hand.

"Have you seen that shocking news about the Duke of Airlie's yacht? Very sad for Lord Malcolm Inverness. Should his eldest brother have been on board, it will make him next heir to the dukedom."

De Montfort was shocked. He had never liked the old Duke of Airlie, but Malcolm's brother, the Marquis of Skye, had been his bosom friend. By some inadvertence, the names of those

drowned were not published until a later cable informed the public that both Malcolm's father and brother and a young sister had perished.

"He's almost as great a catch now as Chandos himself," thought old Mrs Van Eyck, passing the fine French cambric of her handkerchief over her glasses, in order to enable herself to read more easily, as she greedily devoured the details.

.

Ten minutes after receiving Mrs Van Eyck's note De Montfort was hurrying to respond to it in person. His one thought was,—

"I am free !"

CHAPTER XVIII

DEATH

“Oh, to call back the days that are not !”

DINAH MARIA MULOCK CRAIK.

“MRS VAN EYCK, you must excuse me for coming to the house at once. When I got your note saying Mr Barmore and his niece were starting in a few hours for the South, I realised that you would easily understand and excuse me for hastening here at once, even though it might be appearing to intrude upon a house of mourning.

“He’s secure !” thought Kitty’s grandmother, casting her eyes downwards for fear he might read the light of triumph shining there.

“I do not think I need explain to you, Mrs Van Eyck. . . .” The duke went on, a little awkwardly, “I have come here to formally propose for the hand of your grand-daughter.”

.

“Oh, grandmother, I *cannot* go down, and I

don't want to see him. . . . I cannot," she added resolutely.

Mrs Van Eyck had sent the maids away, and the packing, to Kitty's great dismay, was at a standstill.

"Do you mean to dare to tell me you will refuse the duke!" Mrs Van Eyck said, her face white with anger.

"I do not love him," said Kitty, simply.

"Do not love him!" exclaimed the grandmother, contemptuously. "Pray what has that to do with it!"

Kitty's eyes flashed dangerously. Seeing that she had blundered, Mrs Van Eyck went on, with pretended calm,—

"You are too young, Kitty, to understand these things. He loves you devotedly, and will soon teach you to do the same."

Kitty shuddered. She remembered how this man had had power before to persuade her to believe that she loved him, and only by a chance had she become in the least aware that their characters and temperaments were unsuited to each other; thus she felt instinctively, without being able to analyse it, and the result of her knowledge took the form of dread. She feared that this man who had

before had the power to cast such a glamour over her might do so again, were she to permit him the opportunity of seeing her and pleading with her.

“I cannot, grandmother, I cannot.”

Her voice trembled; she felt weak and sick with anxiety regarding her father's state, and ready to cry with worry and weariness.

“Kitty, you shall see him, even if I have to bring him in here.”

The old lady looked about the pretty boudoir with an air of determination which, from experience, Kitty knew there was no resisting. Though still ill, the old woman had risen and made a perfect toilet in anticipation of the duke's coming, telling herself that some slight further effort was necessary if she did not wish “that child” as she always called Kitty in her own mind, to ruin all her well-laid plans by, at the very last moment, refusing the duke. She had seen, with great alarm, that the duke's influence had lessened lately with the girl, and, with just intuition, she divined that Kitty, in her present state of mind, might very likely run counter to all her hopes. She knew well that all her careful teachings and attempts at instilling worldly wisdom into the child's mind

had absolutely failed of their object, and Kitty would return to her Southern home with her mind as fresh and unsullied with worldliness as when she had left it, so few months before.

“Grandmamma!” Kitty desperately faced the old lady, who quailed a little, “I tell you I do not wish to see him, and I will *not* marry him!” she cried, with emphasis, “Please allow the maids to return and finish packing, or I shall miss my train.” Here a sudden light illumined her lovely face, and the brows lost some of their tension. “We can let the baggage come after us!” she cried.

“Yes, certainly,” assented Mrs Van Eyck, “and meanwhile, you will not anger me, my darling, by disobeying me on the last day of your stay with me, dear.” Here she put her arms about Kitty and kissed her tenderly. “I shall have the maids called, and Parker can help them, so that there will be no need to fear that you will miss the train. Kitty dear,” she went on caressingly, “I am an old woman, and you will not disappoint me by refusing my last request . . . ? for you may never see me again . . .” she went on pathetically. She had found by experience

that Kitty might be led where she never would permit herself to be driven.

“Oh, grandmamma! do please not make me see him.”

Mrs Van Eyck's heart gave a bound; she discerned the commencement of Kitty's capitulation.

“Only for a moment, darling,” she answered, with assumed indifference. “It would seem very unkind not even to bid him adieu, when he has always been so very thoughtful and kind to you.”

Her penetration told her that to awaken Kitty's remembrance and gratitude would be the first step gained towards making her give the duke a favourable hearing.

“Come along, my pet.”

Slipping her arm through that of Kitty she led her from the room and towards her own boudoir, where she had left the duke. He, meanwhile, was consumed with impatience, and after his usual wont, strode to and fro the length of the pleasant room. He longed to throw the big bay-window wide open and admit the keen wind from without; the heavy flower odours stifled him, the blaze of the Liverpool coal combined with the steam-heat,

made the atmosphere of the whole house, and of that room in particular, unbearable to the Englishman. His anxiety at the length of time Mrs Van Eyck had been absent increased as the clock's hands moved silently forward; he knew he possessed a clever and determined advocate in Kitty's grandmother, but he began to fear the obstinacy of Kitty's self. Suddenly he recalled Bessie's hints and innuendoes as to Kitty's engagement, and the thought came to him to go and seek Uncle Tom, and demand of him what was the truth at last. As he flung open the door and dashed impetuously down the staircase, he swore to himself that, free or not free, he would make Kitty his wife. It was useless for her to struggle against him; he *would* win her; and a muttered curse passed his lips as he remembered the firmness of her character. The duke found Uncle Tom in the library, and staggered his slow mind with the directness with which he put the question,—

“Tell me, Barmore, is your niece, Kitty Fauntleroy, engaged to be married or not?”

.

While Mrs Van Eyck was pleading with her grandchild, Lord Malcolm Inverness returned

to the house with Tom Barmore. They had been to secure a steamer ticket, and to send cables to Europe. Poor Malcolm found he would have to wait until the afternoon of the morrow before he could start, and was broken-hearted at further cables he had received giving him particulars of his father's, brother's, and little favourite sister's deaths. On re-entering, he had left Tom writing letters in the library, and gone into a quiet little reading-room beyond, which usually remained untenanted. The doors stood always open between the rooms, and a screen prevented the interior of the smaller one from being visible from the library. On entering it, Lord Malcolm threw himself into a wide, low arm-chair beside the fire, and sat staring vacantly into the latter's flaming depths. He felt overwhelmed; everything was wrong. In the midst of all his natural grief for his family came the misery of his hopeless love, and his dread of De Montfort's influence over Kitty. Now he heard the question put by the duke to Uncle Tom, and startled, held his breath, listening for the response. Several moments elapsed, which seemed hours to Lord Malcolm, before Uncle Tom answered, slowly,—

“Little Kitty? Why, she’s only a child! What would she be thinking of marrying for?”

The duke, irritated by this ambiguous response, swore outright.

“—— it, man! can’t you give me a direct answer? Hasn’t Kitty been engaged for a long time to some fellow whom her father won’t let her marry.”

“Who in —— told you that?” cried Uncle Tom, now thoroughly roused.

The duke reddened; he remembered Bessie, and answered evasively,—

“I was informed so.”

“But who informed you?” persisted Uncle Tom, doggedly.

“That’s neither here nor there,” responded the duke, brusquely. “Tell me whether it is true or ever has been true?”

“Never!” said Tom, solemnly, surprised at the other’s warmth. Then he went on, “Our Kit, I guess, has never thought of anyone but her father. Anyway, she never had a beau, and the young fellows around those parts ’peared to look upon her as nothing else nor a child.”

The duke gave a great gasp of relief which was echoed quietly by Lord Malcolm’s heart.

“I will speak to her to-day,” the former thought.

.

“I wonder where the duke can be?”

Mrs Van Eyck's face fell as upon entering her boudoir with Kitty she found it empty. She shivered a little, partly from fear and partly because she had found the boudoir door thrown wide open as it had been left by the duke when he made his impulsive exit, although the air in the corridor was equally well heated. Kitty, greatly relieved, was about to beg her grandmother's permission to return to her own rooms, when the duke appeared.

“Pardon me, Mrs Van Eyck,” he said, bowing, “but I had some business with Mr Barmore.”

He glanced at Kitty, and she trembled as she saw the look of triumph in his eyes. She longed to escape, for, as they all stood there together, she felt his old-time influence stealing over her. It seemed so natural for them all to be in that room together, and habit is a great controller. Looking towards him as he stood with the becoming light of the boudoir falling upon him from the big bay-window, Mrs Van

Eyck's eyes beamed with pleasure, for, as she justly thought, the duke had never looked handsomer. Kitty saw it, too, sensitive as she always had been to the influence of things beautiful. Excitement had brought a rich glow to the generally pale olive of the duke's face, and illumined his eyes with a strange light of which, before now, Kitty had felt the mesmeric power. His rich wavy hair had become slightly disordered. The Duke had a trick of laying his hand upon it when thinking earnestly, which had brought some of its dark rings about his forehead, and made it all the more becoming.

"I must go and see Parker about the packing," said Mrs Van Eyck, vanishing beyond the silken *portière*, and leaving the other two alone. Weakened by the shock she had sustained that morning, Kitty felt her body sway as she realised that the ordeal was beginning. The duke, regarding her with eyes in which passion and triumph contended for the mastery, stepped to her side. She felt him take her hand in his, and trembled at its burning contact.

"Kitty, you are tired, dear," he whispered tenderly, his lips almost touching her hair as he bent over her. "You have had too much

to bear this morning, poor darling." He had assumed an air of protection and possession over her; his experience taught him that woman's dependent nature was more easily influenced when thus controlled by sympathy. "Come and rest."

He left her side for a moment to place a comfortable lounging chair nearer the fire. She stood still, watching him, feeling a sense of comfort steal over her, as she saw him making these arrangements for her ease; she had been so worried and distressed all the morning, and had found no consolation in her grandmother's formal words of sympathy, interrupted as they had been by many lamentations over the unfortunate necessity that had arisen for letting her go back to her father. The old lady had even hinted that she considered Mr Fauntleroy was exaggerating the importance of the reasons for recalling Kitty, and this had put the girl in a passion, at the cold-heartedness of her grandmother, who could for a moment suppose that Mr Fauntleroy would be willing to do without his daughter at this juncture or she herself willing to remain away. Now, the duke's tender care of her, and sympathy for her, came in agreeable contrast with the old

lady's exasperating lamentations. Kitty was soothed, and allowed herself to be led to the chair by the fire and placed comfortably in it. Her feet were cold from nervous tension and suffering, and instinctively she stretched them towards the blaze of the newly-stirred fire.

"Let me warm your hands, too," the duke said, sinking on a low stool beside her, and gathering them both in his, he began to chafe them gently. Several moments passed in silence. Kitty had forgotten her late dislike and fear of him, and felt as if they were back in the old days again, after her illness, when he had constituted himself good Nan's *aide* in nursing her and caring for her. She closed her eyes dreamily. Presently he dropped her hands, and she felt his burning lips upon her closed eyelids. He was kneeling beside her now. Taking her golden head in both his hands, he turned her unresisting mouth upwards, and crushed kisses upon the sweet lips. "Kitty, darling," he whispered hoarsely "my little wife! I may call you that, *now*? I beg your pardon for my words of the other day. I was mad. I see it now. Forgive me, adored, forgive me!" He saw that she was trembling. "I know I was wrong," he urged. "Forgive me,

Kitty. Would you drive me to despair? I cannot live without you," he cried, with emphasis. "If you send me from you again, you send me to . . . destruction," he added, stifling a stronger word in his throat.

"But . . . but . . ." whispered Kitty, faintly. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!! Oh, dear!!!" came in a strong cry from her as she released herself and buried her face in her hands, "I cannot! I do not love you!"

His brows contracted with a furious frown as he heard her, but he controlled himself with great effort, and said calmly,—

"Kitty, my little wife, I know you better than you know yourself. Very young girls are always like that. I frightened you the other day by romantically wanting you to marry me quietly. It was because you are so precious to me that I selfishly wished to keep you all to myself. I see it now I was wrong, very wrong; but you will not punish me for my one great sin of loving you too well. By driving me from you into the world, you will drive me straight to ruin, for I cannot live without you. I will not," he added fiercely, gaining courage. He had again possessed himself of her cold, little hand,

and this time she did not withdraw it. "You remember, darling, how happy we were together when your ankle was hurt?"

She remembered. It was true that then, had he proposed, he would have been accepted. She had grown so accustomed to him he had become almost a necessity of her daily life. She remembered how when he had taken his sudden departure she had felt as if a part of her existence was curtailed, and a great loneliness had made itself apparent to her.

"You know we got on splendidly together, dear," he went on, cursing Bessie as he remembered her part in their separation. "We shall always get on like that, and—we will live with your father," he hastened to add, divining the thought to which she was about to give expression.

"Will you really?" she demanded, very earnestly, bending her blue eyes upon him for the first time.

He grasped both her hands in his, the passionate light in his eyes burning into her own upturned ones.

"I swear it, Kitty, I swear it! Nothing shall ever make me do what displeases you;

and I know it would make you unhappy to leave your father."

"It would! it would!" she cried passionately. She was confused and distressed; his words about driving him to ruin shocked her inexperience. She believed him implicitly, and how could she render herself responsible for his destruction? The poor child bent her face upon her hands, and wept bitterly.

"Kitty!" cried the duke, "Kitty, do you want to break my heart?"

For answer, she rose and went and leant against the mantelpiece. In a moment he saw his advantage; he stepped to her side and wound his arms about her, drawing her tired head against his breast.

"You will be my wife, and save me, Kitty?" he whispered passionately, kissing away her tears. "Say you will, dear, or I shall go mad," he added impulsively.

She shyly raised her eyes, and shuddered as they encountered the hungry fury writ in his.

"Say you will," he urged, crushing her to him till he hurt her. "Say you will . . . You must, or I shall be damned eternally! Say it!" came hissing through his closed teeth. "Say it!"

In his fury he gave her slender body a brutal shake; she, terrified, in an agony of dread, whispered, almost unconsciously,—

“I will.”

Lord Malcolm Inverness, who had halted on the threshold in time to hear the last few words, and seen the furious embrace, let the silken *portière* fall from his nerveless hand, and staggered blindly towards the staircase.

.

As the duke wrung Kitty's unwilling assent from her, Mrs Van Eyck entered the room by the door communicating with her private library; she judged that this was an opportune moment for her interference. The duke, knowing her firm allegiance to himself promptly turned to her for aid. Taking Kitty's irresponsible hand in his, he led her towards her grandmother.

“Congratulate me, dear Mrs Van Eyck. I believe I am one of the happiest of men, for Miss Fauntleroy has promised to be my wife. Allow me to present to you the future Duchess of Chandos.”

His eyes glittered with triumph as they encountered those of the delighted old lady,

and Kitty, with her head bent forward upon her breast, stood silently between them.

Mrs Van Eyck's diplomacy warned her not longer to continue the scene. Coming to Kitty's side, she wound her arm about her and kissed her tenderly, then offering the duke her hand, she said sweetly, "I congratulate you both, duke. I am certain no two people could be better suited to one another." Then she said apologetically, "I grieve to interrupt such a happy moment, but I must see Kitty about the packing. Come with me, dear," she said, winding her arm round the child's waist, about to conduct her from the room. The duke gently took Kitty's disengaged hand and whispered tenderly,—

"My blessed little Kitty, you have made my life, which was so desolate, a very heaven!"

He did not dare to kiss her pale cheek, and contented himself with pressing her cold, little fingers as her grandmother led her from the room.

Kitty neither regarded him nor made response; she walked beside Mrs Van Eyck as if mesmerised. She was thinking, dully,

“Malcolm would never have forced me to consent!”

.

“Please, my lady, Mr Barmore seems very anxious to speak to you.”

“Show him into my library, then.”

A moment later, the footman returned to announce that Uncle Tom was waiting, and Mrs Van Eyck, with a show of great tenderness, handed over Kitty, half-fainting, to the care of her own elderly, and very motherly English maid. Kitty was lying upon a sofa, and as the good woman knelt beside the girl to bathe her aching temples, she thought to herself and said afterwards in the house-keeper's room,—

“Promised bride! I never seen a happy bride like this. No good luck can come out of such beginnings, and, to my mind, we had better dress her for her burying than marry her to the duke.”

Perhaps her thoughts and words were to prove prophetic.

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When Mrs Van Eyck entered the room, she started slightly as Uncle Tom turned his deep-set, haggard eyes upon her; his face was

white and drawn, and in his hands he held a telegram and a letter in Bessie's bold handwriting, also one in that of Mr Fauntleroy's; he looked like a man who had received a great mental shock.

"What is the matter, Mr Barmore?" Mrs Van Eyck's experience told her that something very serious had occurred.

"My brother George is dead," said old Tom, simply, endeavouring to stifle a great sob in his throat.

For one instant Mrs Van Eyck remained shocked; then the thought flashed by her, Kitty's father dead, the girl would remain in her own keeping, and the marriage, which was in prospect, should surely take place. Composing her face to a decent appearance of concern, she said,—

"My dear Mr Barmore, how can I sufficiently condole with you?" Tom here put his great red bandana to his eyes and turned slightly towards the window; his tender heart was riven at the thought of his favourite brother's loss. Suddenly Mrs Van Eyck said, by way of rousing him and terminating what, to her, was simply a painful scene, such as she had made it a practice all her life to avoid,—

“At anyrate, Mr Barmore, we must be extremely thankful that dear Katherine is so well provided for.”

“Yes,” responded Tom, stupidly, perceiving that she had paused, and that an answer of some kind was required of him. In his confusion of mind he began wondering who was Katherine, forgetting that her dignified grandmother never spoke of her by the familiar name of Kitty.

“At least she is magnificently provided for,” went on the old lady. Tom was more mystified than ever, remembering that brother George never had been rich. However, her next sentence enlightened him. “The duke has proposed and been accepted, and when a proper time elapses Katherine will become Duchess of Chandos.”

Simple old Uncle Tom gasped. Looking in a confused manner at the letter he held in his hand, he said,—

“But he was engaged all the time to poor Bessie, and that is why Will Bell has murdered her, and this has killed brother George.”

“Oh, Dad! Dad!”

With a fearful cry Kitty fell forward at their feet.

CHAPTER XIX

FAREWELL!

“Ah, dear, but come thou back to me;
Whatever change the years have wrought,
I find not yet one lonely thought
That cries against my wish for thee.”

ALFRED TENNYSON.

POOR Lord Malcolm, who was now the Duke of Airlie, left for England on the next day; he knew his mother and other sister must be in the greatest distress and in need of his care, else, as he told himself, nothing should have torn him from the city where poor little Kitty lay prostrated, perhaps dying, by the shock of her father's death. Good old Uncle Tom accompanied Lord Malcolm on board the great Inman liner, and they were standing together awaiting the bell to sound all strangers to shore; they both looked careworn and very different from their usual wont.

“Tom, old fellow,” said Lord Malcolm, affec-

tionately, "you will write to me by every mail until she's better?"

For answer, good old Uncle Tom could only wring the other's hand, and great tears stood in his eyes as he looked into those of his companion with a dog-like regard of affection. Presently, swallowing a great lump in his throat, he said huskily,—

"Would to God, Malcolm, that she was to marry you instead."

A spasm of pain crossed Lord Malcolm's mouth.

"Would to God, indeed, it were so." The words came hardly above his breath, and his kind blue eyes strained, unseeing, towards the other shore.

At this moment the last bell rang, and there was the usual rush ashore. The friends gripped hands, and eloquent eyes told more to aching hearts than many spoken words; then, silently, with lagging footsteps, poor old Tom left the other and went down the gangway, the hoarse-throated whistle sounded, and the great steamer began to swing slowly out of her dock.

Lord Malcolm was a good sailor, and after having watched poor, old, waiting Tom's face

disappear, indistinguishable, into the mass of humanity which swarmed to the head of the pier to shout and wave last farewells to parting friends, he left the crowded steamer's rail, and seeking a part of the long deck which was deserted, began to pace mechanically to and fro. His face was drawn and white, and lips tense; his blue eyes had a strained, sleepless look. As he walked, he drew his handkerchief from his breast pocket, and was surprised to perceive a small, dainty mass of lace and finest cambric fall at his feet. He stooped and raised it. As he did so, a little whiff of perfume reached him; a spasm of pain convulsed his fair face, and he crushed the handkerchief against his lips.

“Kitty, my little Kitty! Merciful God! how shall I ever live to see her wife to another?”

.

Many weeks passed slowly by, leaving sweet spring behind on the turning pages of the year's book. Summer had come, with its burning skies above the sun-scorched pavements of the great city, its flowers at the street-corners, its shopping women, its deserted homes, and throngs of lightly-clad business men hurrying along the stifling, crowded streets.

In Fifth Avenue one of the few houses which stood still in winter trim—flowers in its balconies, and no hoardings before its doors—was Mrs Van Eyck's. Within all was gloom and anxiety, for Kitty, prostrated by brain fever, lay at the point of death.

Mrs Van Eyck's anxiety regarding the marriage had been too great to permit of her going as usual to her Newport residence. Kitty could not be moved, and the former stayed on through the long, hot days, near her granddaughter. She had made Uncle Tom bring good Nan up from the South, and the affectionate creature never left her darling's bedside day or night. The duke had been, of course, in constant attendance, and Uncle Tom, for the sake of the latter, had been permitted until now by Mrs Van Eyck to still form part of the household.

Poor little Kitty lay white and still, the shadow of her former joyous self, amidst the delicate linen and soft laces of her dainty bed. Last night had been the turning point in her illness, and consciousness had returned; her extreme prostration, however, left her unable to take any notice of what was passing around her, and only the faint movement caused by

her breathing enabled those about her to know that she lived. Every few minutes the duke, haggard-eyed and with quiet tread, came in from the boudoir and stood gazing upon her, as she lay with her long eyelashes sweeping her wasted cheeks and her masses of red-gold curls thrown back above her pillows.

“When can we move her?” he whispered anxiously to Mrs Van Eyck.

“In a few days,” came the answering whisper, and the duke went back to his post by the window, obliged to be content.

.

“It must be soon, my darling, because I have urgent affairs which call me to London.”

She looked up at him with a pained, pleading expression; the thought of being taken to London appalled Kitty, the more so, as her health not being yet re-established, her mind was prone to exaggerate everything, and rendered her timid and afraid of novelty. It was sunset, and Kitty was lying upon a couch in a shady corner of the verandah of Mrs Van Eyck's Newport cottage with the duke in attendance upon her. He had just brought her a great mass of roses, and they lay upon her lap, their fragrance, wafted by the faint

breeze, filled the air with sweetness. For the first time the duke had dared to allude to the subject of their marriage; he knew too well, the difficulties of his position to approach the theme with much confidence of gaining Kitty's willing assent. At the same time, his overwhelming passion for her urged him to precipitation, fearing, as he did, that some chance word might reveal to her the secret of Bessie's death and her connection with himself. He also knew the subtle influence of sickness upon the will power, and determined, with Mrs Van Eyck's assent, to hasten their marriage, before Kitty could obtain strength of mind and body sufficient to enable her to perceive the false step which she was about to make.

Mrs Van Eyck had impressed upon Uncle Tom and Nan the necessity for concealing from Kitty all the facts in connection with Bessie and the duke. Good old Nan was always easily led, and Kitty's grandmother found little difficulty in persuading her of the necessity for reserve; but with Uncle Tom it had been different, and Mrs Van Eyck felt continually in dread of his breaking silence. Now Kitty turned troubled eyes towards the duke, saying,—

“But can you not go first and attend to your affairs in England, and when you return, perhaps . . . perhaps. . . .”

“My darling, you cannot ask me this. Let us be married at once. Your grandmother wishes it; your health demands change and travel, and I. . . .”

He had taken her hand, which he caressed in both his own, and was looking into her blue eyes, which met his, all too unmoved by passion, with a startled and troubled expression in them. He saw the effect of his words upon her, and cursed himself anew that he had not the power to make her love him. Then came the thought, “But he would win her against all odds, and it should be her fault if she were not happy later on.”

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CHAPTER XX

THE EVE OF THE WEDDING

“Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.”

ALFRED TENNYSON.

THE sweet fragrance of the sleeping gardens filled the sultry night air with heavy odours. Kitty sat at her window, gazing sadly at the rising moon, already waned to half her splendour of ten days ago, when she was at her full. Nothing disturbed the silence save, now and then, the shrill whistle of a bat as he flew, to and fro, above the tops of the shrubs below, across the face of the queen of night.

The wedding was on the morrow, and everything was in readiness. Only half-an-hour since good Aunt Nan had retired, after, for the hundreth time, making sure that all was right, and every detail of the bride's toilet in perfect readiness. Simple old Nan was dazzled by the fact that her little Kitty was

so soon to become a duchess, and it blinded her usually discerning eyes to the fact that the child, of all those interested, was the only one who seemed unhappy; Mrs Van Eyck's quick perceptions enabled her to see this, as also did the duke, and Uncle Tom, in his dog-like affection, had a dumb sense that all was not right, although Mrs Van Eyck's repeated assurances to the contrary should have led him to believe otherwise.

The moon rose higher, and Kitty, her white face resting on her clasped hands, sat on, wondering what the future might hold for her. Her father's death had been an irremediable blow to her; it had left her stunned and careless of what became of her. Even Tom and Nan appeared to her to have changed; they and Mrs Van Eyck were intent upon the preparations for the wedding they had no thought for her they only cared for this hated rank, this great wealth, and position, this title. Mrs Van Eyck and Nan were continually singing the praises of the giver-to-be of all these, telling her of the duke's devotion, of his sufferings during her illness, of the bright dreams he had for their united future, till, at length, Kitty, her life rendered

void by the death of her father, weak in mind and body by reason of her long illness, had been brought to consent to this marriage, feeling in a manner bound to recompense the duke for his love, and content to give him her future, thinking that with the death of her father all joy was at an end for her and it mattered little what became of herself so long as she made those about her content, and she herself could escape into a state of approximate peace.

The hours of the short summer's night wore on, and Kitty still sat watching and keeping her lonely vigil, quiet tears from time to time coursing down her delicate face, as she thought of all that had been, and now and then a convulsion of passionate weeping as she remembered her father, and recalled how he had speeded her upon her journey, his own heart breaking at this, their first separation, telling her it was only for a few short months, not knowing that it was to be for ever. Kitty, her heart wrung by these sad memories, sat on, lost in the past, caring nothing for the future, and conscious only that she suffered dumbly, as only the young and untried soul can suffer, ignorant

that with the years comes healing, and that in life *tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse*.

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It was the "darkest hour before the dawn," a slight breeze had arisen, presage of the coming day, and Kitty was suddenly startled by the opening of a side door of the sleeping house, and the sound of a man's footsteps as it crossed the broad piazza and stepped over the crunching gravel drive to the silence of the lawn beyond. He passed directly beneath her windows, and she could tell by his slow, somewhat halting step that it was Uncle Tom. A sudden longing seized the girl for sympathy, for human companionship; a great loneliness came over her; she felt as if she had suddenly awakened from a state of trance, as if she must rise and fly from the self of this past night, with its crowding ghosts and memories. She hurriedly arose, and taking a light mantle of fleecy whiteness, she threw it round her, opened her door and hastened towards the great staircase.

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Uncle Tom's conscience had also peopled his night with evil dreams and memories. His troubled sleep had finally been broken by an

accusing vision of Malcolm, who seemed to stand again with him upon the steamer's deck, listening with bent brows to his own story of the coming marriage, and how, owing to the sequence of events, and Mrs Van Eyck's and the duke's influence, he had been powerless to hinder the union of the girl Malcolm worshipped with the man whom they both had, such good reason to distrust and despise. For some time Tom tossed miserably in his bed, wishing that he had not heeded Mrs Van Eyck's warnings and her specious representations of how great was Kitty's love for the duke, and the impossibility that the marriage could be broken off, and, above all, her injunction to absolute silence regarding Bessie's death, and her relation to Kitty's promised husband.

Too late Tom's slow mind had begun to realise that Kitty was, owing to her weak state of health, both physical and mental, a consenting party to her own ruin, and that this union, into which she had been coerced by her grandmother, could bring little else than misery in the future. These thoughts overwhelmed Tom; the close night air seemed stifling him. He arose, determining to clear his brain by a walk above the sea, upon the cliff, till sunrise.

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Mrs Van Eyck had also passed a restless night. Her schemes had succeeded so well thus far that, upon the very verge of realisation, she feared something unforeseen and unprovided-for happening, which should demolish the whole fabric of her dreams. By the aid of her little rose-shaded night-lamp she looked at her watch, and saw that it was the last hour before morning. She felt oppressed, and thought she would arise and open the large window and look out into the garden. Her maid slept in the next room, but she would not call her; she preferred the society of her own thoughts; so, slipping her feet into her *pantoufles*, she threw a wrap round her shoulders, and was about to go to the window, when the sound of an opening door arrested her steps. "Thieves!" flashed across her mind, and she was about to summon her maid, then, hearing a light, fearless step approaching, she changed her mind, took up the pink-shaded lamp, opened her door, and confronted the tear-stained face of Kitty.

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"Did you say she is asleep, Parker?"

"Yes, my lady, I did as you commanded, and sat by her until the medicine you gave me had

put her off. She will sleep now until it is time to waken her for the wedding. She said her uncle was out in the garden, and she wanted to go and walk with him and cure her headache." The maid looked into her lady's cold, haughty face and thought, "If the bride that is to be had said to cure her heartache, I believe it would have been more near the truth, poor child!" and the good creature, dismissed by her mistress, returned sadly to her pillow.

"What a fortunate chance it was that I should have heard her," thought Mrs Van Eyck, aloud. "Had she joined Tom Barmore in the garden, there is no knowing what foolish confidences might not have been exchanged, and her splendid future thrown away for the mere whim of a silly, ignorant child. I know what is for her good, and there will come a time when she will thank me for my care and foresight."

With which comforting self-assurance, the old woman sipped a little strong beef-tea, kept simmering the night long over a small lamp, and, later on, stepped into bed with the feeling of having done her duty under very delicate and difficult circumstances.

Kitty's maid, aroused by order of Mrs Van

Eyck, sat drowsily watching the pale, sleeping face of her young lady, wondering how it could be possible that one could weep, who, upon the morrow, was about to be translated into the fairy regions of Duchessdom.

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The last night of the Duke of Chandos's bachelor life was not passed in giving a farewell dinner to his friends, nor in any of the usual pre-nuptial rejoicings common to young men of the present day.

He had passed the evening quietly with Kitty and Mrs Van Eyck; the latter being too clever to leave them much to themselves.

Kitty had been kind and gentle and pathetic, as he found her almost always now. She had smiled quietly up into his face as he presented her with his magnificent family jewels, which he had had reset and sent from England for his bride. Old Mrs Van Eyck's eyes sparkled as she saw the duke place the coronet upon Kitty's lovely head, and the duke himself felt proud as he looked at the girl, standing there so quietly, the great jewels flashing a thousand sparks above her brow, and about her throat and arms. Then had come the last good-night before their marriage day. Mrs Van Eyck had

prudently left them for a moment, and gone into the room beyond. The duke's eyes sought those of Kitty as soon as they were alone, hoping to find in them some approach to response to the passion which burned in his own. It maddened him to see her standing there so still and white. Another man might have trembled for their future, but he, blind to everything except the gratification of his mad desire, obstinate in his determination to possess her, and careless of all else, was content to let the future take care of itself. He approached her, and putting his arms about her, crushed her to him; his blood beat in his temples, filling his brain with confusion as with the sound of hammers; she reeled as he held her in his strong arms, hurting her with the fierceness of his embrace. To him all was forgotten but the thought "To-morrow!"

Kitty's heart beat fast, but it was with fear. She trembled in his mad grasp; all the sweetness in her cried out against her inability to make response; she longed to be able to love him in return. He was so soon to be her husband, and she found it terrible that he lacked the power to move her. She felt the

fever of his lips crushing kisses upon her eyes, her mouth, her throat, and her own lips grew white and cold with terror. Other women could love, and why not she? In her innocence she wondered whether the love of the husband was not always stronger than that of the wife. She heard his voice murmuring to her between his kisses, whispering of his passion for her, and pleading for her passionate response. A faintness seized her. He could feel her slender limbs droop through her delicate clinging white draperies; had it not been that he sustained her, she would have fallen.

“Forgive me, Kitty, beloved little wife! I have been brutal,” he said hoarsely. “I am mad to-night; forgive me, dear.”

He placed her in a great lounging chair by the window, where the moonlight fell upon her, bathing with its cold rays this colder bride. She lay motionless; her beautiful hair, slipped from its bindings, fallen about her breast, and concealing its lovely outline from his hungering sight. Gazing upon her, he felt, for the first time, some faint remorse. For a moment he hesitated, then she wearily moved her head aside, the waving masses of her hair fell back from her shoulder discovering the exquisite

curve of her neck and her little ear. Again his brain reeled ; her loveliness was all to him. What mattered it that the girl was cold ? Very young girls were so. He would trust to his own mad love to awaken hers ; after marriage he would know how to compel response.

Once since her illness she had pleaded with him, telling him that with her father's death all love seemed dead in her, and that she felt she could not love him with the devotion of a wife, and feeling thus, the idea of marriage appalled her. His answer had been that his own love was sufficient for both, and that with marriage he would teach her to feel all that she now knew she lacked ; and she, weak from the effects of her late illness, weary with his insistence and that of her grandmother, had succumbed to his will, letting events take their course, till now she stood upon the threshold of their bridal day, gazing with terror into the future as she lay there, so still, with closed eyes, in the moonlight. She trembled as she felt him kneel beside her and take her hand. The pale moonbeams kissed the white curve of her neck, and again she felt his burning lips upon her there. She recoiled ; he seemed so rough. What was she to do ? and how could

she ever marry him? She struggled to draw her hands away; he was hurting her. What should she do? Another moment and her misery would have given her courage to end it all and tell him she could never be his wife. It was too horrible thus to be bound to go before the altar and . . . Mrs Van Eyck's voice sounded faint from the conservatory beyond. The duke bounded to his feet, and wishing to save the girl confusion, went to meet the old lady, his step uncertain and the blood reeling in his brain. With one or two words of polite good-night, he found himself dismissed, and Mrs Van Eyck went forward to conduct Kitty to her pillow. "I am glad that is over," thought the old lady. "Some men are so impetuous, and a girl of Kitty's temperament cannot understand. To-morrow, thank heaven! all my responsibilities will be at an end. Come, my dear," she added aloud, "I want you to let Barton see you to sleep; you are not strong, and need your long night's repose."

Kitty, trembling still, attempted to rise.

"Grandmother," she began. Something in her tone warned Mrs Van Eyck of approaching danger; she interposed quickly with,—

"My darling, we will not talk to-night. You

are tired, and everything seems strange and difficult to you," she added with diplomacy. "We will retire, and in the morning you shall talk to me."

As she wound her arm about Kitty, and led her towards the great staircase, the old woman made a mental note that, in the morning, there should be no time for any further conversation, nor any moment for relenting.

CHAPTER XXI

THE AMERICAN DUCHESS

“I held it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.”

ALFRED TENNYSON.

A very quiet party assembled in one of the reception rooms of Mrs Van Eyck's Newport home. As Kitty was in deep mourning, there could be no fashionable gathering or great assemblage. Only the members of the family were to be present at the wedding.

Old Nan was up betimes ; she was so restless that she could not sleep, and left her bed soon after dawn. Her conscience troubled her, for she had had a letter from Bessie's father and mother, to whom the news of the proposed wedding had only just become known, commanding her to tell Kitty all, before the irrevocable step was taken. Nan's affection for the duke, as well as for Kitty, made her

hesitate, and her great fear of Kitty's grandmother, whom she looked upon as a most terrible old woman, confirmed her in her desire to keep the contents of her letter to herself. "At least," she thought weakly, "I shall let the wedding be over first."

So it happened that poor little Kitty, weak with illness, and broken-hearted over her father's death, her mind possessed by a foolish idea that, because of his great passion for her, she ought to sacrifice herself and become the wife of the duke, went on to her fate, when one enlightening word as to past events might have saved her from a future of much suffering, peril, and regret. She, in so innocently sacrificing herself, was not aware that she was also destroying the happiness of Malcolm's life. He, poor fellow, kept informed of events by Uncle Tom, watched the course these events were taking in shaping the future of his beloved, with each day more poignant suffering. Since his father's death, his mother's severe illness had rendered it impossible for him to think of leaving her, otherwise he would have returned to New York. He was in doubt as to what course he ought to pursue, for, naturally, he was not cognisant of what Kitty's real feelings were

towards the duke, and, knowing that she was engaged to the latter, he naturally supposed that she loved her intended husband; and in this case no one had any right to interfere and cause disunion between them. Thus Malcolm was obliged to stand and watch, helpless to change the course of events.

Old Mrs Van Eyck's strict orders upon the morning of the wedding were that, until she went herself to superintend the toilet of the bride, no one should enter Kitty's room, nor in any way disturb her. The sleeping-draught did its soothing work well, and the poor young bride slept on, innocent of the fact, that the morning of her bridal day was far advanced, and that her new life was coming towards her with giant strides. Uncle Tom went about the house in miserable plight; his affection for both Malcolm and Kitty made him ill-like this marriage, and he longed to be able to arrest it, but lacked the courage necessary to taking a decisive step. Mrs Van Eyck alone was content; she felt that nothing short of a catastrophe could now supervene to hinder the wedding which she had so much at heart.

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Kitty awoke to find her grandmother and

Nan standing by her bedside full of congratulations and assumed delight in her supposed happiness. For a moment the girl was dazed, not understanding, then, like a flash, she grasped the situation, and with a sickening sense of horrible loss, realised that it was the last morning of her virgin life. She was sitting up amidst her pillows, her cheeks flushed like those of an awakening child, her eyes looking frightened and very bright, and her magnificent hair falling about her in masses of red-gold, upon which the sunshine from the window threw its wanton kisses. She looked up pitifully into the faces of the other two, twisting her little hands together as she did so.

“Come, my dear,” said her grandmother, in calm, unfeeling voice, “the duke will soon be here, and everything is in readiness.” She said this in a tone which admitted of no discussion, and the girl sitting there felt that there could be none now, matters had gone too far for looking back.

“Send me Marie, grandmamma.”

“No, I shall myself superintend everything, as I should have done for your mother, had she but let me,” she went on, with a shade of added bitterness.

Nan at these words stooped and kissed her darling; the girl's lips trembled, and Mrs Van Eyck, seeing signs of breaking down in her, suggested, and forced her to drink a cordial which she had provided. At this moment Marie entered with a lovely basket of white orchids from the duke. Poor Kitty, gazing at them, felt as if she were already dead, and she assisting at her own obsequies. The sleeping - draught's effects filled her mind with fantasies, and she was not yet entirely herself.

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The blessing was given, the last words said which made Kitty Duchess of Chandos. She stood beside her husband responding to the congratulations of those about her with a strained, haunted look in her eyes, and her sweet, child's face white as her bridal robes. The duke looked triumphant; he was thinking, "Mine at last! nothing can separate us now!" So powerful were his feelings that they blinded him to the fact that a deadly faintness was overcoming poor little Kitty. The heavy perfume of the flowers about her grew sickening, the room with its groups of people reeled before her darkening sight, the

voices sounding far away as if coming from some other world, then darkness. . . .

Uncle Tom sprang to Kitty's side in time to save her from falling to the ground. Mrs Van Eyck hastened to apply restoratives, the duke, taking Kitty from Tom's arms, cursed himself mentally for his want of thought; and Nan—well, Nan's conscience began to trouble her once more. "It is an evil omen!" she gasped to herself. "It is an evil omen!" But nobody troubled themselves with poor, weak, kind, old Nan, and she was left to work whatever mischief might suggest itself to her. Having put off what she considered an unpleasant duty until the eleventh hour, she now feebly determined to right herself with conscience by confessing all to Kitty as soon as she could find herself alone with her.

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Kitty stood once more in her own room, being gowned for her wedding journey. The duke, whose affairs were really most urgently in need of his presence in England, had determined to take his bride there at once. He had also a selfish longing to take her from every association which could remind her of the past. He wanted her all to him-

self, and his jealous nature resented the idea of his wife having any other interest than himself. He was keenly sensitive to the fact that, although now master of her destiny, he was not yet master of her heart; and he had determined that, once his wife, the accomplishment of this latter victory would be easy. He remembered the old days, down South, when, by assiduous devotion to her, and patience, he had almost persuaded Kitty to believe she loved him, and he cursed Bessie's mad passion for him, which, intervening, had ruined all.

Mrs Van Eyck determined that nothing untoward should happen, had not left the bride's side, and was busy giving orders to her own and Kitty's maid, who, at last, was to have her dearest wish accomplished, and go abroad with the duchess. Old Nan hung about, each moment growing more wretched, and seeing that she would have no opportunity allowed her for speech alone with Kitty.

Kitty herself looked happier. After moments of great depression come others of exhilaration, whether false or true, and each equally serves to divert the mind from oppressing thoughts.

The duke had shown himself devoted in aiding Kitty's recovery from her fainting-fit, and he told himself that to gain her heart would be easy, as he noted the grateful smile in her blue eyes in response for the little kindly offices he was performing for her. Kitty, upon her part, felt soothed and almost happy; it was sweet thus to be loved; she would do her utmost to love him in return. Impatient of the time they took to prepare her for their journey to New York, the duke came to the open boudoir door and looked in. Kitty blushed as she looked up and encountered his passionate gaze fixed upon her, and then bowed her head a little as her sweet eyes fell before the fire of his.

Half-an-hour later they were in the closed carriage, the jealous down-drawn blinds guarding the new-made bride from every curious gaze. Kitty's happy mood continued. With delight her husband saw this, and turning to her, wound his arms about her with passionate joy.

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"What shall I answer sister Kitty and brother Tom?" wailed Nan to herself that night, as she sat sobbing upon the side of

her luxurious bed. She felt like a mother bereaved of her little one in losing Kitty, and her tears came fast and many. By-and-by the moon rose and flooded the room about her with its rays.

“I can still do it,” cried Nan, starting to her feet and going to the wide-open window to drink in the fresh breeze. “I can write it to her, and then, all the same, I can say to the folks at home that I have told her.”

Note.—The sequel to this book will shortly appear under the title of *An International Marriage*.

THE END

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